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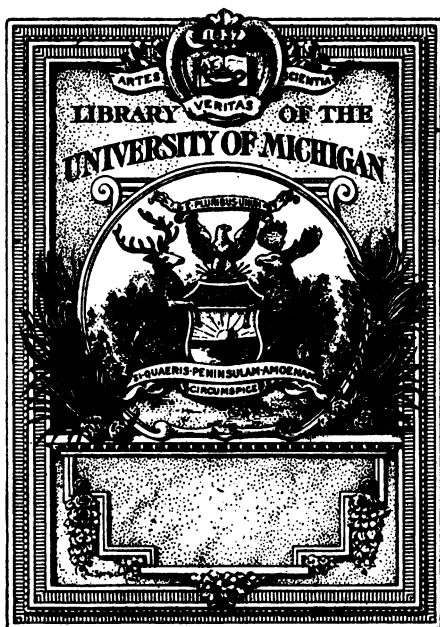
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LITTLE COMEDIES

OLD AND NEW

BY

JULIAN STURGIS

AUTHOR OF

'AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN,' 'JOHN-A-DREAMS,' ETC.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MDCCCLXXXII

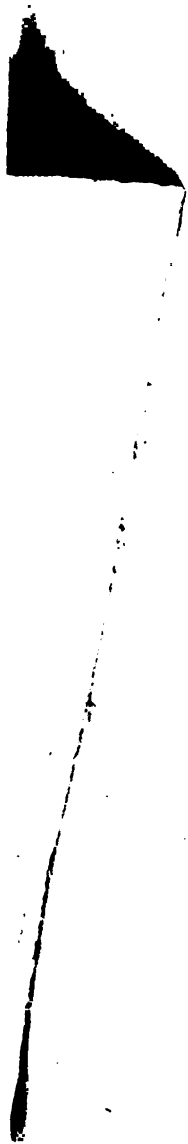


3 DEC 1892

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A P P L E S



A P P L E S

A P P L E S.

It is spring-time in Rome, and one of the first hot days. In the veiled light of his studio CLAUD HUNTLEY is painting LADY ROEDALE'S picture. He likes to talk as he works.

Claud. Then why did you offer to sit to me?

Lady Roedale. Why? Why? It's too hot to give reasons. Perhaps because your studio is the coolest place in Rome. Or shall I merely say that I sit to you because I choose?

Cl. That's better. You always did what you chose. And now you are free. You delight in your liberty.

Lady R. "Delight" is a strong word. It is suggestive of violent emotion. I detest violence.

Cl. You say with Hamlet, "Man delights me not."

Lady R. I say nothing with Hamlet. Heaven defend me from such presumption! and besides, Hamlet was a bore, and thought too much of himself.

Cl. Heaven defend you from presumption! But any way you agree. You don't like man, and you do like liberty?

Lady R. I prefer liberty of the two. A widow can do what she pleases, and, and this is far better, she need not do anything which bores her.

Cl. Ah, there you are wrong. Your liberty is a sham. You are bound by a thousand silk threads of society. Your conduct is modified by the criticism of a dozen tea-tables. Trippet takes your cup, and sees that your eyes are red. By the way they are red——

Lady R. Thank you. If I am looking frightful, we had better postpone the sitting.

Cl. Your eyes are red: off runs Trippet with the news. Lady Roedale has been crying. Why? Why! of course because the Marchese has left Rome—says Trippet.

Lady R. Does he? Trippet is odious; and so is the Marchese, a Narcissus stuffed and dyed, who has been in love with himself for seventy years. You are all insufferable, all you men.

Cl. I beg your pardon.

Lady R. Oh, don't. If you were not so delightfully rude, I should go to sleep. I used to have a snappish little dog, such a dear, that barked when I dozed. He was very good for me—but he died.

Cl. And when I die, I should recommend a parrot.

Lady R. A parrot! A very good idea. A parrot to say, "Wake up, my lady." Will you get him for me?

Cl. I shall be dead. He is to replace me, you know.

Lady R. No; I shouldn't like that. I like you best, after all.

Cl. That is very kind of you. I believe you do like me, when you remember my existence.

Lady R. You wouldn't have me think of you all day. A man always about is insufferable.

Cl. Everything is insufferable or odious to-day.

Lady R. Do you think so?

Cl. I mean that you think so.

Lady R. How can you know what I think? I am sure I don't know what I think. It is so hot. I ought not to have sat to-day, but after all, as I said, your studio is the coolest place in Rome.

Cl. My room is better than my company.

Lady R. I hate jokes in hot weather. They remind me of "laughter holding both his sides," and "tables in a roar," and all sorts of violent things.

Cl. It's no good. I can't get on. You look so lazy and indifferent. I hate that expression.

Lady R. I am sorry that my appearance is repulsive.

Cl. I wish it were. But no matter. We were

saying—what were we saying? Oh, I remember. You were saying that you could not bear to have a man always about the house.

Lady R. I have been married.

Cl. How can you bear to talk of that?

Lady R. I don't know. (*She yawns and stretches out her arms lazily.*) I am free now.

Cl. Are you so in love with freedom?

Lady R. In love! I don't like the expression. "In love" is a vile phrase.

Cl. And you think yourself free. Did not I tell you that you can't move hand or foot without being talked about; that you can't buy a bonnet without being married to some fool; that you can't pass a club window without setting flippancy tongues wagging, nor stay at home without tea-drinking dowagers finding the reason? didn't I tell you——

Lady R. Yes, you did.

Cl. I wish I had the right to stop their tongues.

Lady R. You are a very old friend.

Cl. That's not enough.

Lady R. How hot it is!

Cl. Very. Will you be so kind as to turn your head a little more to the left?

Lady R. Oh dear, how cross you are! and you ought to be so happy. You are not like me. You have something to do. You can stand all day and smudge on colour.

Cl. A nice occupation—smudging on colour.

Lady R. One can't select one's words in hot weather. I wish I could smudge.

Cl. You can sit for pictures.

Lady R. A nice occupation—sitting for pictures! To be perched on a platform, with a stiff neck, and a cross painter, a Heine without poetry. I believe that you are only painting my gown. I shall stay at home to-morrow, and send my gown.

Cl. Your gown will be less cruel. (*He puts down his painting tools.*) Why do you play with me like this?

Lady R. Play? I was not aware I was doing anything so amusing.

Cl. It must end some day.

Lady R. Everything ends—even the hot weather.

Cl. Clara!

Lady R. Now, please, don't quarrel. We have always been good friends, you and I.

Cl. Friends! Yes.

Lady R. Do let well alone.

Cl. Very well. As you please. The head a little more up. Thanks. (*He takes up his painting tools.*) You don't look well.

Lady R. I am sorry that I look ugly.

Cl. You don't look ugly. How irritating you are!

Lady R. I am sorry that I am so disagreeable.

Cl. Oh! I shall spoil this picture. Perhaps it will be more like the original.

Lady R. Spoiled! Oh, Claud, I do wish you wouldn't be funny till the weather is cooler. It's almost vulgar. Besides I am not spoiled, not in the least. I am generally slighted. No woman was ever so neglected. I am not fast enough to be a success.

But to be fast in this heat! Oh dear me! it's tiresome enough to be slow.

Cl. I am glad that you are no faster—not that it is any business of mine, as you were about to say. The chin a little more up. Thank you.

Lady R. How kind of you to talk for me! It saves me so much trouble. Go on; say what else I am about to say. You amuse me.

Cl. I am glad to do what I can for you. I will talk for you, walk for you, fetch and carry for you, live for you, die for you, and so——

Lady R. Mockery! Heine!

Cl. "Without the poetry!" As you please. Take it as mockery.

Lady R. All romance is mockery. Romance is as much out of date as good manners.

Cl. Was I rude again? I beg your pardon.

Lady R. Only fashionably uncivil. It's quite the thing. The best men talk of women as if they were horses.

Cl. And women treat men as if they were donkeys.

Lady R. Oh dear me, how quick you are! I wish I was quick, and modern, and jolly. I wish I was a jolly good fellow, with the last clown-gag. "You'll get yourself disliked, my boy;" "How ah yah, Sportsman?" How popular I should be! But I can't do it naturally. I am not to the manner born. I am *bourgeoise*. Good heavens! Perhaps I am genteel!

Cl. I thought I was to do your talking for you. As if any woman could be silent for ten minutes!

Lady R. Do you think I wish to talk? I am not equal to the exertion. Time me then. I won't speak a word for ten—no, for five minutes.

Cl. Keep your head up, please. Thank you.

Lady R. "How are you to-morrow?" I never could see the humour of that.

Cl. Just half a minute.

Lady R. Don't be ridiculous. Ah me! I shall never be a success.

Cl. A success! What do you want? to be stared at by every booby at the opera—to have a dozen

fools smiling and looking conscious when your name is mentioned—to hear your sayings repeated, and lies told about you, and your gowns described, and your movements chronicled?

Lady R. It is my dream.

Cl. All women are alike — all women, except one perhaps.

Lady R. "Except one!" Who? who? Oh, Claud, do tell me!

Cl. That's better. Now you look awake. Keep that expression. Ah! now you've lost it again.

Lady R. You horrid man, tell me at once. Who is it? Oh, Claud, do tell me, please!

Cl. It's nothing. I spoke without thinking.

Lady R. Then you meant what you said. I don't care for things which men say after thinking. Then they deceive us, poor simple women that we are!

Cl. Simple! There was never a simple woman since Eve. The best women manage us for our good—the worst for our ill. The ends are different, but the means the same.

Lady R. Was the one woman—the exceptional woman—the paragon—was she not simple?

Cl. On my soul I think so. *She* was not bent on success—success in society. Yes, she was simple.

Lady R. So is bread and butter.

Cl. And she was clever too. The innocence of a child and the wit of a woman, with a sweet wholesome humour—not a compound of sham epigram and rude repartee.

Lady R. I know, I know. A man's woman! a man's woman! With a pet lamb frisking before her, and an adoring mastiff at her heels; childlike gaiety in her step and frolic fun; a gown of crisp white muslin; an innocent sash; the hair plain, quite plain; and the nose a little reddened by cold water. Oh, how I should like to see her!

Cl. You are not likely to be gratified. She is buried, as you would say, in the country.

Lady R. Do the Tyrrels never leave Lime-shire?

Cl. The Tyrrels! How do you know? Why

should you think I was talking of them? Have they a daughter?

Lady R. Have they a daughter! When men try diplomacy how they overdo it! Have they a daughter! Claud, Claud, how strange that you should not know that the Tyrrels have a daughter, when you spent a whole summer at the Tyrrels' place, from the very beginning of May to the very end of September, and the girl was at home during the whole of your visit!

Cl. How do you know that?

Lady R. Do you think that there is one of your numerous lady friends who does not know the history of all your love affairs?

Cl. Perhaps you will favour me with this history. It will probably be entirely new to me.

Lady R. I will try. But it is hard to remember in this hot weather. Now, attend. The scene is laid at Lindenhurst, an ancient house in Limeshire. There dwell the living representatives of the family of Tyrrel, older than the house; and thither came in early

spring a painter bent on sketching—a sort of Lord of Burleigh—a Heinrich Heine—a man not too young, a—— who was the man who had seen many cities and things?

Cl. Odysseus. Ulysses.

Lady R. And who was the girl who played ball?
The *ingénue*?

Cl. That Nausicaa should be called an *ingénue*!

Lady R. Ulysses, who had been in many societies and seen all sorts of people, was rather tired of it all, and growing a little snappish and cross. So he sketched because he had nothing better to do, and he looked at Nausicaa for the same reason: and so, by degrees, he found himself soothed and refreshed by the girl's artlessness, or apparent artlessness.

Cl. Apparent!

Lady R. She was such a contrast to the weary women of the world. She was so ingenuous, oh, so ingenuous! When he went to sketch, she went with him, as a matter of course; and she showed him her favourite bits; and he made a thousand pretty pic-

tures of cows and pigs and dandelions, and, above all, of the old orchard, full of apple-trees. He developed a passion for painting apple-trees in every stage, from blossom to fruit. And the country seemed very countrified, and the green refreshingly green, and the cows nice and milky, and the pigs unconventional, and the dandelions a great deal finer than camellias, and everything lazy and industrious and delightful. And so the jaded man was very much pleased by the novelty.

Cl. A very pretty story. Pray go on. Your expression is almost animated, and this picture is coming a little better.

Lady R. Then came the reaction.

Cl. That's not so lively. There! Now you have altered your face entirely.

Lady R. The novelty ceased to be a novelty. Old Tyrrel grew grumpy. Mamma had always thought the child might do better if she had a season in London. And then my lord Ulysses got disgusted, and the curtain fell—and so the idyl ended. There, I

have told you how the country miss set her rustic cap at the man of the world, and set it in vain.

Cl. She was utterly incapable of setting her cap at anybody.

Lady R. Who? Miss Lottie—Tottie—Nelly—Milly—What's-her-name?

Cl. Betty. Miss Tyrrel.

Lady R. Then I have succeeded in recalling her to your mind? The Tyrrels *have* a daughter.

Cl. Go on, if it amuses you.

Lady R. It does amuse me a little. Now it is for you to take up the story. Why did you go away and leave this Arcadia and Miss Nausicaa?

Cl. Because I was afraid of loving her. That is the truth, since you will know it. And now let us drop it. It is as much a thing of the past as the Pyramids. I want to talk of the present—of you, Clara, if I may.

Lady R. Things of the past are so seldom past. The Pyramids are about still. I must know why you were afraid of loving this girl.

Cl. What is the use of talking about that?

Lady R. It's as bad as suppressing the third volume of one's novel. If you don't tell me I shall go away.

Cl. Why should I mind telling you? It's a tale of the dark ages long ago. Keep your head a little more to the left.

Lady R. But I want to look at you.

Cl. Deny yourself that pleasure if you can. Thanks.

Lady R. Well? Go on, do.

Cl. A nice fellow I was to win the love of a young girl.

Lady R. Why? You are not worse than most men.

Cl. Will you kindly keep your head turned to the left? Thanks. There was a girl with all the world about her sweet and bright and young, and a woman's life before her with promise of all good. There was I, a man who had outlived my illusions—who had found the world dusty, chokingly

dusty. The apples were dust in my mouth. I had tried most things, and failed in most things. My art was of less importance than my dinner. I could still dine, though I didn't eat fruit in the evening. Bah! The apples turned to dust between my teeth. Why should I link a young creature, fresh as a June rose, to a dry stick?

Lady R. They train roses so sometimes.

Cl. Misleading metaphor! I came away. It's all over, all well over, long ago. Why you insist on raking up this foolish matter, I can't imagine. Yes, I can. It is to turn the conversation. You know quite well what I wish to say to you, what I have made up my mind to say to you. We have known each other for a long time, Clara: we have always been friends: we have both outlived some illusions: I think we should get on well together. Clara, consult your own happiness and mine. What do you think?

Lady R. May I look round now?

Cl. Do be serious. Don't be provoking.

Lady R. And you think that two dry sticks supporting each other is a more engaging spectacle than a rose trained on a prop?

Cl. Enough of tropes. I deserve a plain answer.

Lady R. Don't people strike sparks by rubbing two sticks together?

Cl. What are you talking about?

Lady R. How the sparks would fly! I suppose that I ought to be very grateful, Claud. I am not quite sure. It's not a magnificent offer. A banquet of lost illusions and Dead Sea fruit. What a pleasant household! "This is my husband, a gentleman who has outlived his illusions."—"Permit me to present you to my wife, a lady who has everything but a heart." Will you have an apple? We import them ourselves fresh from the Dead Sea. Fresh!

Cl. I wonder you don't find the weather too hot for comedy.

Lady R. Do you call that comedy? It seems to me dreary enough.

Cl. The thought of joining your lot to mine?

Lady R. My lot! I never was dignified by such a possession. I go on by chance, and so do you. We have run along very pleasantly side by side. Hadn't we better leave it like that? If we were linked together, like two shaky vans in a goods-train, which of us would go in front?

Cl. You've the most provoking passion for metaphor.

Lady R. And you are sure that you have quite got over your admiration for Miss Tyrrel?

Cl. Don't talk of that. I tell you it is as much over as youth. I shall never see her again.

Lady R. You think not?

Cl. I am sure. The Tyrrels never leave Lindenhurst.

Lady R. What should you say if I told you that they were in Rome,—let us say at the hotel opposite?

Cl. I should say that you were romancing. If I believed you I should leave Rome to-day.

Lady R. Then don't believe me. Couldn't you get me some ice?

Cl. I am afraid that my man is out.

Lady R. You said that you would fetch and carry for me.

Cl. Oh, you want to be rid of me! Very well, I'll go. I don't mind appearances.

Lady R. Why should you? Don't be long.

Cl. You mean it? Oh, very well, I'll go.

Lady R. *Au revoir!*

(*Hereupon CLAUD goes out and leaves LADY ROEDALE alone.*)

Lady R. She is in Rome, nevertheless, Mr Claud, this Miss Betty of the apple-orchard. Shall I tell him, or shall I not? I am so sleepy that I can't decide on anything. Do I want to marry Claud Huntley? Ugh! I don't know. I am too sleepy to think. How tiresome men are! Why won't they stay good friends instead of turning into bad lovers? The age of lovers is past. Love is im-

possible in so enlightened a generation. I am bored and he is bored. We shall be twice as bored together. That's mathematics, or logic, or something. Now I daresay that Claud thinks I have sent him away that I may consider his proposal. As if it wasn't much too hot to consider anything. It would be easier to take him than to think about it. Dear old Claud! I am sure he pictures me at this moment striding up and down, twisting my handkerchief like the woman in the play, and muttering, "Oh Claud, Claud, why distract me thus? Oh cruel man, will you not leave me at peace?" Shall I say Yes or No? What would he say if he met Miss Betty? What would she say? I am very sleepy—very, very sleepy. He pictures me in an awful state of excitement and agitation. What must be, must. Apples turn to dust—cottage and crust. I'll let things drift. It doesn't matter much, not much. Oh Claud! oh cruel man! oh sleep! I'll take a nap just to spite him.

*(So she falls asleep, screened from the eyes of
MISS BETTY TYRELL, who presently comes
in, stepping lightly and quickly.)*

Betty. I saw him go out. He's sure not to come back yet. I am so frightened, and it is such fun. What's the good of being in Rome, if you don't do as the Romans do? He must have gone for his daily walk. He can't be back yet. And if he does come, why should I care? I shan't be frightened. He always said I was very cool. If he comes in, I shall drop him a curtsey, and say, "How do you do, Mr Huntley? I said I would look in on you some day, and here I am." And he will make me a bow, and — but probably he won't know me. He'll take me for a tourist lady visiting his studio, and wanting to buy pictures; and I shall say, "Yes, thank you, very nice; put up that, and that; and would you be so kind as to send them down to my carriage?—yes, and the little one in the corner too, please." Why, what is it? Yes, it is, it is the old orchard, our

orchard, our orchard in May, with all the bright new blossoms, as it was when he—— He used to say that it was like the foam of the sea at sunrise. I don't think he ever saw the sun rise. He was awfully lazy. How good of him to keep this near him—the orchard, and a little corner of the dear old house! Oh blossoms, blossoms, you are there now at home, and I wish I was there too, and had never come out and grown wise and old in this horrid world! It was there that I saw him first, just there. He was following papa through the little gate with the broken hinge, and he bent his head under the blossoms. He looked so tall, and so tired. And yet he hadn't been doing anything. Men are very strange. The less they do, the more tired they are. Why, here's another picture of the orchard. How funny! It must be autumn, for the apples are all ripe. But who is the young man in the funny cap? And who are the three ladies? And why does he sit, when they are standing? I can't make it out. Do they want the apple? If you

please, sir, give it to the lady with the shield and spear. That other one is not nice, not nice, I am sure. I don't care much for that picture. Are there any more apple pictures? No; no. Yes, here's another. Adam and Eve, I think. Yes, here is one great glittering coil of the serpent. I don't like Eve. What a languid, fine-lady Eve! Who's face is this? How handsome! And this? And this one on the easel? Everywhere the same face, handsome, lazy, indifferent. No, no, no, he never would be happy with her. It's Eve's face. Wicked woman! Wicked woman!

Lady R. (waking). Did you call me? Ah, what a sweet air! The day is changed.

B. Oh, I beg your pardon.

Lady R. (drowsily). Are you real, or a dream?

B. I am real. No; I had better say that I am a dream and melt away.

Lady R. I was just dreaming of you, Miss Tyrrel.

B. Of me? You don't know me. How do you

know—? I mean, you called me by some name, I think.

Lady R. Yes, Miss Innocence, I called you "Miss Tyrrel."

B. How can you know?

Lady R. I am a witch, for one thing; and for another, I saw your picture.

B. Has he got a picture of *me*?

Lady R. Of course, my dear.

B. And did he show it to *you*?

Lady R. Of course not, my dear. I was looking about for curiosity's sake, and I saw it.

B. You are often here, then? Oh, I beg your pardon. I have no right to question you. But I don't know who you are.

Lady R. I am Lady Roedale; I am a widow; I am sitting for my picture; I am an old friend of Mr Huntley. Will that do?

B. A friend.

Lady R. A friend, my sweet Simplicity. And you? What brings you here?

B. Me? I—I am an old friend too.

Lady R. An old friend! Not quite old enough, I think.

B. Oh, Lady Roedale, I didn't think. I ought not to have come.

Lady R. It's very pretty and unconventional, my dear. Somebody said that you were so simple, that you didn't know what was conventional and what wasn't.

B. Oh, Lady Roedale, you know—you know that women are not like that.

Lady R. Yes, I know.

B. But I didn't think; I didn't stop to think, or I shouldn't have come. We are living just opposite, and I saw him go out, and all of a sudden I thought what fun it would be to see his studio when he was away, and that I could run back, and he would never know. But if I had only known that you were here, I would have died sooner than come.

Lady R. It is better to live.

B. But you won't tell him? Promise me that

you won't tell him. If you will only promise me, I will never come back, I will never see him again, —never, never.

Lady R. Don't be rash, my dear. You are safe now. You have run into the arms of a chaperon, a duenna, a gorgon. But if Mr Huntley is an old friend of yours, why didn't your father and mother come to see him too?

B. Because they are hurt. He went away so suddenly from home, and he never wrote, and they liked him so much, and they thought it unkind; but I know he never meant to be unkind, for he was always kind, and I know that he wouldn't be angry even at my coming here, and —and that's why.

Lady R. That's why, is it?

B. You don't think that I am very bad?

Lady R. My dear, you are much too good. I have no taste for bread and milk and book muslin; I don't like men's women; but I do like you.

B. Thank you, thank you. Now I see that he has

not flattered you, not a bit. I thought at first that he had. He had his heart in his work when he did this.

Lady R. Shall I show you the work in which his heart is?

B. Yes.

(*LADY ROEDALE draws aside a curtain and shows a picture.*)

B. My picture!

Lady R. Yours.

B. Oh, let me go. If he should come and find me here. Oh, let me go, let me go.

Lady R. Too late. I hear him on the stairs.

B. What shall I do?

Lady R. Do as you are bid. Give me your picture, quick! Now go behind the curtain, and be still.

(*She draws the curtain carefully. CLAUD enters, bringing ice.*)

Claud. I bring you ice, and something better. The heat is passing; the day is changed. Ah, the air smells wooingly here. See how I fetch and carry! Doesn't this convince you that I——

Lady R. (studying the picture). Yes, it is pretty.

Cl. Where did you get that?

Lady R. Don't be angry; I won't hurt it.

Cl. As you please. It's of no value—now.

Lady R. It is much better than mine. Indeed it has only one fault.

Cl. Indeed?

Lady R. It is awfully flattered.

Cl. How can you know, when you never saw the original?

Lady R. Ah, that is very true. How can I know, if I never saw the original?

Cl. Put it down, please. I want to talk to you about—to go back to what we were saying, when——

Lady R. Shall I throw it down here?

Cl. Take care! What are you doing?

Lady R. I thought you said it was of no value?

Cl. It isn't. But then we are vain, you know, we artists; we don't like to see our work, even our bad work, destroyed.

Lady R. Then I won't destroy it. I'll improve it.

Cl. What are you going to do? I don't quite understand. Let me put it away.

Lady R. No, don't touch it. I often think of taking up painting again. This is evidently unfinished. Why is it unfinished?

Cl. I was afraid of spoiling it.

Lady R. Ah, that was when it was of some value; but now——

Cl. Now it doesn't matter. Let me put it away.

Lady R. I shall finish it myself.

Cl. You!

Lady R. Any valueless old thing will do to practise my hand on; I am just in the mood. You have painted enough this morning. It's my turn.

Cl. But Clara——

Lady R. Come, take my picture off the easel. There! There she is in my place. A change for the

better, I think. Stand out of the light. I shall make her lovely.

(As she begins to arrange the colours on the palette, he gets more and more anxious.)

Cl. Here, try this. This sketch is much better to work on.

Lady R. Don't bother. I am bent on improving this young woman.

Cl. That's a very odd colour you are getting.

Lady R. What can it matter to you?

Cl. Clara, what are you at? Stop!

(He snatches the picture from the easel.)

Lady R. And the picture is of no value?

Cl. I beg your pardon, Clara.

Lady R. Valueless, but too valuable for me.

Cl. Clara, you won't understand.

Lady R. Oh yes, I will. A mere sketch, and absurdly flattered.

Cl. Flattered! (*He holds the picture in his hands, perusing it.*) How can you know?

Lady R. It is much prettier than Miss Tyrrel.

Cl. What do you mean? Well, yes, I believe, if I remember right, that it was taken from Miss Tyrrel.

Lady R. And I believe, if I remember right, that it is twice as pretty as Miss Tyrrel.

Cl. You have never seen her.

Lady R. Indeed I have.

Cl. Indeed! Where?

Lady R. Here.

Cl. In Rome?

Lady R. Here.

Cl. Here! What do you mean?

Lady R. Here, in this room.

Cl. Clara, I daresay that this is extremely amusing to you. I don't see the joke myself. I don't see why you should rake up this old story. Yes, I do see. You wish to quarrel, to find an excuse for not answering me, when I ask you——

Lady R. She was here.

Cl. The Tyrrels never leave Lindenhurst.

Lady R. The Tyrrels are in Rome.

Cl. Is this true? Don't push this joke too far.

Lady R. It is true.

Cl. Then I must go.

Lady R. Why?

Cl. Is it true that the Tyrrels are here in Rome?

Lady R. It is true.

Cl. I must go then. Oh, don't imagine anything extraordinary. It is a simple matter. These people were kind to me, kind with a generous hospitality which is rare. I stayed and stayed in their house, until I thought that I should never go, until I feared that—— Well it came to this: Here were people who, in honesty and good faith, had treated me like a king; people who——

Lady R. Don't dilate upon the Tyrrel character just now.

Cl. What was I doing in return for all their goodness? I found myself trying to win the love of their

only child, a girl with no knowledge of the world, who had seen no men to speak of, and who might take me, even me, for a very fine fellow.

Lady R. You were on the way to get what you wanted.

Cl. I was not a scoundrel. I knew myself: a man who had knocked about the world, a painting vagabond, a social cynic, not worthy to touch her hand or look into her eyes. High-flown, you think; but I was not a scoundrel, and I went away.

Lady R. But now?

Cl. Now? Well, now, I don't want to have to do the thing again.

Lady R. Then it would be hard to see her again and go?

Cl. Yes.

Lady R. You loved her?

Cl. I suppose so.

Lady R. I always thought that you were not a bad fellow.

Cl. I am not over-good. I don't wish to open

an old wound. That's not extraordinary virtue, is it?

Lady R. And the girl? What of her?

Cl. By this time she has seen scores of men, in all respects better than me, confound them. She? Why she——

Lady R. Stop. Don't say too much about Miss Betty Tyrrel. Put her picture back and drop the subject. Put the picture back in its place.

Cl. Very well. I don't want to bore you.

(So he goes to replace the picture, and draws aside the curtain. There is BETTY TYRREL. Then there is silence in the room for a time.)

Betty. Mr Huntley, I am very sorry. I did not mean to listen.

Cl. Betty—Miss Tyrrel—is it you?

B. Oh, forgive me. I did not mean to listen.

Cl. And it is you indeed!

B. But I did not mean it. Oh, you believe that I did not hide myself here to listen?

Cl. You!

Lady R. It was my fault.

Cl. What do you mean?

Lady R. Do attend to me. Miss Tyrrel is my friend. She came to fetch me after my sitting. Finding that the studio belonged to you of all men in the world, she was frightened; and I put her there.

B. Thank you—oh, thank you. Mr Huntley, it is so good of her to say that. But I must tell you. We are living just opposite, papa and mamma and I; and I saw you go out; and I thought you were going away; and I never stopped to think; and I slipped out by myself; and I did so want to see the place where you worked. I did not stop to think; that was where I was wrong. And I found her here, and I was frightened.

Lady R. Yes, as I told you, she was frightened, and I put her in the corner. Good heavens, Claud! ain't

you going to say something? Why do you stand there like a tragedian, or a May-pole? Oh, you men!

B. Won't you forgive me?

Cl. Forgive you! Why? Can you do any wrong? You have heard me say what I never dared to say in the old days. I am glad that you have heard me. You will think more kindly of me, some day, when—— May I see you safe across the street? Will you say all kind things for me to Mr and Mrs Tyrrel?

Lady R. Is the man a fool?

B. You are not angry with me, then?

Cl. Are you not angry with me for having dared to love you?

B. I never was angry with you, not even when you went away so suddenly.

Cl. Were you sorry? Oh, take care, take care, child. Don't deceive me or yourself. Were you sorry when I went away?

B. We were all sorry, very sorry.

Cl. But you, you? You came here: would you

stay here—with me? Oh child, is it possible that you should care for me?

B. Yes.

Cl. If I had known this!

Lady R. Any one but a man would have known it years ago. (*As she looks at CLAUD and BETTY, she begins to smile at her own thoughts.*) There were only two in Paradise, in the first apple-orchard, unless you count the serpent; and that is a rôle for which I have neither inclination nor capacity.

(*LADY ROEDALE goes towards the door; and so ends the Comedy.*)

THE BISHOP ASTRAY

THE BISHOP ASTRAY.

A BISHOP having preached with effect on Sunday in the marine parish of Winbeach, has set forth on the Monday to ride through the wood to Winford, where he is to open a church. He has sent his man and his luggage by train; and, as the way is not long and the day exceeding fair, he rides along on a bridle-path. Ambling easily, he permits himself to be soothed by the sweet air of spring.

How sweet the air is! It is an old saying—but oh, how profoundly true!—that the renewal of the year suggests alway the renewal of youth. The memory of childhood's hours is strangely clear with

me to-day. That looks a delightful seat; Nature seems to have prepared a throne for me in the forest; I should like to get off and try it. And why should I not? I have abundance of time. Whoa! Steady, old horse, while I dismount. Good Robin! There you are securely fastened; and now—yes; the seat is most excellent. Ha! what a change from the saddle!—capacious, soft, delightful! I think I may venture to lay aside my hat; the air is so soft that I have no fear of taking cold; this glade is so secluded that surely I need not hesitate to lay aside my dignity for the moment—(*he lays aside his hat.*) Memories of my careless, wayward boyhood throng thick upon me. What a climber I was! I should have been up among the branches in those days, not sitting among the roots. And I have climbed since then; I have risen to some eminence;—yes. I can afford an idle hour—an hour of sitting lowly amid the gnarled roots. Wouldn't it be better if I leaned a little more back?—yes, that's much better; there is nothing derogatory in a recumbent position: after

all, there is no luxury like that which simple Nature prepares for us in the sweet woodland ways—that's pretty; quite a poetical expression: how fond I was of poetry when I was a boy! Dear me, it must be a long time since I have read any poetry! No, no; by the by, there was that admirable volume dedicated to me by Canon Pipoon; I read it with the greatest interest; it was full of most valuable thought and feeling—a very valuable book for these days—as I remember I told him. As poetry—I wonder what Susan would have thought of the Canon's poetry. I fear she would have laughed at it; even I myself might have laughed in those days. Certainly it was a very different sort of poetry which we used to shout about the wood. Our wood at home was very like this. As I lie here and look up into the clouds of young yellow oak-leaves swimming in yellow light, I can almost fancy myself a heedless boy again, at home with sister Susan—poor sister Susan!

It makes me sigh that I must enjoy my eminence alone. Poor girl! How romantic she was, how

foolishly romantic; and how bitterly she was punished! I wonder what became of her husband, that accurs—— that unhappy fiddler,—and of the boy and girl? It is strange how little I have thought of them of late years. I have been very busy; the cares of my high office—and besides, I exhausted every means of finding them; and beyond the bare notice of their mother's death, I could find nothing. Poor Susan!—How soft and drowsy is this fertile air! Delicious repose! Yes, there is a certain stiffness about the poetry of Canon Pipoon, a constraint—there is something which interferes with my ease. I fancy that I am somewhat tightly braced; really this spot is so strictly private, that I might almost venture; “*dulce est desipere in*”—that is, surely there is no harm. I think I may venture on a little relaxation. (*He loosens his apron.*) Ah! that is good. I feel young and light at heart as a boy. O boyhood, happy, careless boyhood! O—ow!! There must be a stone in my boot. I have a busy time before me; it will never do for me to be lame. I

ought to take my boot off.—Tut! Dear, dear! What have I done? It's in the other boot. I must have that off too. How nice and cool for the feet! It is an excellent thing to have one's boots off for a little while. I think I have read somewhere that on campaigns—yes.

(So the Bishop lies on his back, and wags a free foot in the air; soon he begins to hum, and after a little the vague humming passes into song.)

“O many the leaves of the summer trees,
And they tremble to all the airs;
O many the lights on the summer seas
Wherever a sunbeam flares;
A myriad answer the sun,
But my love loves but one;
The breeze loves many, but none my one love shares.”

Let me see: how does it go on? “Young Kate is as—as proud as”—as what? Dear, dear, what rubbish it is! It must be twenty years since I have thought

of that ridiculous song. Tut, tut, how does it go? It's not worth remembering; but I can't bear to think that my memory is not so good as it was. Nothing is more important to a man in my position than a good memory. I mustn't give it up; I must not be beaten. Ah—ah!—yes:

“Young Kitty's an icicle bright in the sun,
But she melts and is nought to me;
And Dolly's a glow-worm when day is done,
That the stars peep down to see:
There are maidens a-many, I wis,
But one—but one—to kiss;
There are maidens a-many, but none—but none——”

*(The voice of Auriol is heard in the wood: he
sings loudly)*

“I'll kiss but thee.”

Bishop. Eh? eh? No, no; that's not it.

Auriol. Powers of the air! What have we here?
Are you a fish or an islander?

(The Bishop reaches one hand towards his shoes, and with the other grasps his apron.)

A. Prithee lie still, Bully Hercules! I should never forgive myself if I disturbed such repose. Are you a brother of our order—of our disorder? Are you too a player? Are you a heavy father?

B. No, sir. *(He sinks back with a smile and a sigh.)* A character!

A. The pity of it! What is the value of such dignity and comely obesity save for a heavy father? The boards shall groan beneath your tread. Come with me to Winbeach, and be presented to the best of managers as my Alter Ego—which for your ears unlearned I will render as “My other self,”—as my most substantial shadow.

B. My path lies in the other direction. I am on my way to Winford.

A. Speak not of Winford. I have been starring there.

B. Starring?

A. Yes, sir. I arose a new star over the steaming flats of Winford; but the eyes of the yokels had grown so used to staring on earth, that they could not look towards heaven. I was compelled to abandon the last two acts of "Hamlet," and, in lieu of harrowing my royal mother's soul, I betook myself to some ground-tumbling. Then was I under the eyes of the earth-born; they were aware of me; they thundered with their hobnails on the boards.

B. A precarious life, I fear, my friend.

A. Up to-day and down to-morrow; luckily it is always to-day. Isn't this good enough? This wood; this air full of healthful fragrance; this fresh springing fern where the sunshine is 'prisoned; this mossy couch, whereon even you might yield me a corner for sitting. Thank you; that's good. Now, here are we two rascals as happy as virtuous souls! All this scene is ours, and all for nothing; we sit at our ease like gentlemen; we have, as it were, come in with an order; we are on Nature's free list. But come, you

were singing as I drew near ; I too will lie along ;
and now, like Tityrus and Melibœus, will we contend
in song. Do you begin ; and if the victory be yours,
I will give you a shilling.

B. No, no, I—— I did not know that I was
singing. I was but testing my memory. It is very
important for me that my memory should not fail me.
I have a great deal to remember, a great deal of grave
responsibility.

A. Powers of the air ! This man speaks like an
orator.

B. An indifferent orator.

A. Are you a politician ?

B. My position compels me to take some share in
legislature.

A. (*groans and says—*) Repent, and take some
honest calling. My heart warms strangely to you :
come with me and be a heavy father.

B. Truly, sir, I did not look to be admonished by
a gentleman of your profession.

A. Come to me for good counsel. (*He sings.*)

"In the morning, by the bright light,
When Gabriel sounds his trumpet in the morning."

B. Gabriel!

A. Pardon me: I have a weakness for piety. Even you, though sadly given to flesh, may have some taste for religion. Have you?

B. A what? Have I what? I trust—I devoutly—I humbly trust that I am not without religion.

A. Enough of this mocking tone! "How ill grey hairs——" You know the rest. (*He sings.*)

"Carve that possum, chillen,

Carve that possum, chillen,

Carve him to the heart!"

You too need carving to the heart, old possum. It may be that you have a heart; but it beats faintly beneath that load of flesh. Dig down to it; lay it open to sweet nature.

B. My friend, I am not in the habit of *hearing* sermons.

A. I would you were. Layer on layer of worldli-

ness, repelling jelly-like ; and yet deep down my love for you describes a scarce perceptible human pulse, a faint heart-beat. I am strangely moved by some consciousness of a divine spark smouldering under this mountain ; I would have you fan the flame. My unknown uncle may be some such feather-bed as you, and yet not wholly feathers.

B. Your uncle !

A. "A little more than kin, and less than kind." My mother's brother, but no more like my mother than I to Hercules. My mother "was a lady ; last night she died ;" or, to speak more accurately, she died in giving me birth ; my father the fiddler sold me for drink ; my sister the ballet-girl taught me to dance ; "my name is Norval."

B. A fiddler ! God bless my soul !

A. Amen to that ! For the rest, I was baptised in a pint-pot, and they called me Auriol, after the carpenter's cat, who was my sponsor. Auriol, Aurio-lus, Auriolanus, Coriolanus, or what you will. Such as I am, I am beloved by all men, save only managers ;

I have a good leg but a torn stocking ; a defective shirt but a cheerful heart beneath it ; nay, here under this waistcoat—under this place where once a waistcoat was — there is a spark, a divine glimmer, a prisoned fire-fly, which I would not exchange for a dinner a-day, for the savoury meats which you love.

B. Poor lad !

A. Nay, not so poor neither. Listen ! Do you hear that chink ? It takes two coins to chink. Moreover, I have a royal mantle ; item, a blunted sword ; item, a plume twice dyed for my hat ; item, a pair of long stockings of good silk, plum-coloured, but little darned ; item, an unfailing stock of health, —and of spirits, for which I must ask your pardon. You are probably richer than I ; indeed, I observe that your shoes are but little worn, and that your cob is well-rounded in the barrel ; yet who knows if you are happier than I. If I am sometimes too hungry, you are always overfed.

B. You should avoid personalities. You spoke of your father as a violinist ?

A. Fiddler; a bad fiddler, and a worse man; a poor thing, but mine own—my father: in our society it is much to have had a father.

B. What was your father's name?

A. "Old Scratch" was he called; methinks the name became him well.

B. Can you tell me no more of him?

A. Perhaps you knew him.

B. No.

A. He was worth knowing. He was a merry man when sober; but he would cry in his cups: he drank at the fountain of a sentimental melancholy. And he was a regular man, too; you could tell the day of the week by my father's eye. Of a Saturday night it was dissolved in tears, for he was borne to bed weeping; on Sunday it was red and dry as Sahara, and he would often go to church with much groaning of the spirit; but after church the desert eye would slowly disappear like a lurid sun in mist, while my parent sought to forget the wickedness of the world; on the Monday it was but half open; on the Tuesday it was

kindly sentimental; but by the Wednesday it was a merry eye, and my father went cheerfully to work. Yet cheerful himself, he caused no cheerfulness; mothers rebuked him for their infants' pangs; only curs sang to his fiddling; and thus did he, who began life with a pointed toe and a curl on his forehead, teacher of the ancient art of dancing——

B. He was a dancing-master?

A. Ay, sir; he taught the graceful art to crisp and pig-tailed maidens in a country town; and from that height he fell! First, he was extra fiddle, dresser, rougist, and occasional crowd to a company of strollers; and at last, as the curl grew thin, and the foot grew thick, he would even play at street corners, and would reap the reward of iniquity, being paid the more readily in proportion to the harshness of his playing.

B. And was he married when he taught dancing?

A. He danced into matrimony. He was a young and comely bachelor, when he pointed the toe of example. Pupils came and went—those of finer ear

went first. Among those who came was one, one in whose heart young love had lit his flame. She marked and loved the curl upon his brow. He marked and loved the pigtail at her neck. They fled together, and——excuse these tears; she was my mother.

B. And her name? What was her name?

A. The sacred name of wife, and in due time the yet more sacred name of mother.

B. What was her maiden name?

A. Her maiden name was Susan Tomlinson. Her father plied the trade of bookseller at dreamy Sandwich, by the eastern sea.

B. Good heavens!

A. Do not swear, old man.

(The Bishop remains silent, lost in thought and staring at Auriol: Auriol whittles.)

B. And your sister? You spoke of a sister? Is she older than you?

A. We are twins—twin blossoms on one stalk.

B. And you said, I think, that she danced ?

A. Yes, sir. Our mother died and left us. Our father melted from us. But ere he melted, he taught my sturdy sister some steps of the dance. Now she dances much and well. She is famous, while I—but no matter ! a time will come.

B. And your sister ? A dancer's profession is, I understand, beset by peculiar perils. Has she—is she——

A. She is. She goes straight. She is a square girl. She is as good a woman as stands on one toe in England.

B. And her tastes ? How would she be, for instance—excuse my asking such questions, but you interest me, you and your story—how would your sister fill a more secure, a more domestic position ?

A. She can make an Irish stew with any coök in England.

B. But—again pardon me—has she education, refinement ?

A. If I be poor, I am honest : Josephine lacks

culture. She has not her brother's polite education; the grosser baby, she is still the grosser; she writes with much action of the tongue; she knows not a line of Shakespeare; but to her honour be it said that she can remain on the blunted end of her right foot for a longer time than any woman of her weight in England.

(The Bishop groans.)

A. Now, though our songs be yet unsung, I must away for Winbeach, where I trust to find the salt fisherman more open than the loamy yokel to the touch of genius. Farewell, good father.

B. Stay a moment. Shall you be long at Winbeach?

A. So long as the marine audience afford me other victual than stale fish.

B. And your address is The Theatre?

A. Yes.

B. An actor has sometimes a collection—I should say a benefit?

A. Sometimes—and sometimes he makes money by it.

B. Could you not take the theatre for a night? If so, I—you have interested me so much—I am perplexed how to serve you—I would privately—privately, of course—take all the sittings.

A. Let me look on thee. Come to my heart, old man; and address your cheque to the Theatre Royal.

B. And perhaps I could — without indelicacy — send some present, some useful present, to your sister.

A. You can, and shall.—You have nothing more to say to me? No? Then, farewell again.

B. Good-bye.

(Auriol goes away. The Bishop, left alone, ambles up and down in sore perplexity.)

B. My nearest kin, my nearest kin! What's to be done? A stroller and a dancer! The scandal, the

scandal! I cannot see my duty plain. Hi, there!
Stop! You, sir! Mr Auriol, hi!

(Auriol comes back.)

A. Well?

B. I am in great perplexity.

A. Come to me for counsel.

B. To you, an actor? Pardon me, but it is a point of conscience.

A. I, too, have a conscience. I make a point of keeping one about me.

B. Well, I will put it to you. It can do no harm. Your story has perplexed me strangely. It has called to my mind the case of a friend of mine.

A. Ha, ha. That friend! That old stage friend! We all know him. I lend my ear. Proceed.

B. My friend has a somewhat exalted position in the world; in fact he is a dignitary of the—the Bench;—or rather (to be more strictly accurate) of the Church.

A. Nothing is proved against him so far.

B. My friend had but one relation in the world—a sister, whom he loved very dearly. When a mere boy, he was ordained, and went away to a distant part of the country. He was absorbed by his new work, and eager—yes, as I most truly believe—eager to do good; he was perhaps forgetful—yes, too forgetful of his home. Thus it happened that his sister—his dear sister—left alone—formed an unfortunate attachment. She went away with a man who taught—a man her inferior in every way. My friend strove hard to find her; but he failed. She kept her secret all these years; I only found out lately that her silence was the silence of the grave. Poor Susan!

A. Poor friend of yours!

B. Yes; it was terrible for my friend. She was dead; but she had left children—two children. My friend heard that these children had grown up in great freedom; had, in fact, led a roving life; quite harmless and—even worthy, but a life which had unfitted them, or presumably unfitted them, to share the sober and decorous life of my friend. They were

both, in some way or other, connected with the stage. That is why I am moved to ask your advice. Advise me. And I will advise my friend.

A. What is your difficulty—that is, the difficulty of your friend?

B. Is he bound to make himself known to these people? to take them to his home?

A. His near kin?

B. His nearest kin.

A. Should these strollers sit at a bishop's table?

B. Is it not impossible? Ought he to ask them?

A. Would they come?

B. Of course. What a change for them! From poverty to comfort,—from a precarious to a settled and dignified life.

A. From porter to claret,—doubtful porter to certain claret! Are you honest with me, lord bishop?

B. What would you have me say?

A. I would have a bishop speak the truth.

B. I am your uncle—your mother's brother.

Now?

A. I knew it.

B. You knew it?

A. We know that friend, we of the buskin :
bishops and all, you borrow that old trick from the
boards. I think I half knew you, when I saw you
first.

B. What shall I do ?

A. Nothing.

B. Nothing !

A. I shall think better of bishops for your sake.
But I will not live with you, eat with you, or drink
with you. Like our coats, we are cut differently. I
should make your friends jump ; you would stifle
mine. Go home, good mine uncle, and say that you
have met a fool i' the forest ; and, prithee, think
better of fools, as I will think better of bishops.
And so give me your hand, good uncle, and good-bye ;
and by the powers of the air I will never call you
nunky again !

B. But your sister ?

A. My sister shall know nothing. She would be

dull as a modern tragedy, were she tied to a bishop's apron-strings; yet for the weakness of woman, and for her itching for pantries and kitchens and good order, I dare not tell her. A linen-closet might tempt her to her own damnation.

B. Hush!

A. She shall know nothing, and be happy with her dancing and smiling.

B. But can I do nothing for her?

A. Ay, that you can. You shall settle something on her (be it mine to devise the means)—ay, and on your loving nephew too, pardye!

B. That I can do, and will. My lawyer shall arrange the matter with yours.

A. With mine! I keep a lawyer! I'd as lief keep a polecat.

B. Well, well: a not unnatural prejudice! However, I will speak to my lawyer, in whom I have perfect confidence; he will arrange everything without unnecessary publicity: he shall write to you to the theatre at Winbeach, and, if necessary, arrange a meeting.

A. If necessary, I will risk it. And now I am already a man with an income, with so much a-year ! Pray heaven it do no violence to my art,—that my wit grow not lean as my waist waxes. Yet I'll risk it. And now for the last time, mine uncle—your blessing, uncle.

B. I give it you with a full heart.

A. Ay, and with a full purse, like a nabob uncle in a play : if I did not laugh, I should weep—and so no more, but thank you.

B. And I thank you.

A. What for ?

B. For a lesson.

A. Good-bye. Let me hold your stirrup : so. And now, your road lies eastward ; mine to the setting sun. See how the grass road lies golden under my feet. Chink, chink, two shillings to ring together ! Clink, clink, and away in the golden weather ! Good-bye.

B. Good-bye, my dear boy, good-bye.

A. Good-bye.

FIRE-FLIES



FIRE-FLIES.

The long row of windows is yellow with the festive light within, and yields gay music softened to the summer night : before the windows the broad terrace is mysterious under the rising moon ; and far below dreams the old river, and the shadows fade from her. Ancient and grim is the city, with her palaces and prisons. Here on the terrace is a young woman, masked and musing : there is a young man, musing and masked. She speaks.

Bice. I am so sorry that I can't feel sad. I parted from Bino this morning. I love Bino. Certainly I love him. We are parted. Parted ! Why do I not

feel sad? It is very distressing. The night is so beautiful and the dance so gay. For no woman in the world but the Vera would I dance after a parting from Bino. The Vera sent for me in her old imperious way, and here I am. Here am I in this cruel, cruel city, left alone, in gay attire, and hiding beneath the mask, a sad, sad face. Only it is not sad. Ah me! There is too much joy in the air: the night is too beautiful: the music is too sweet: it comes to me like fairy music. The river lingers in the moonlight, and I linger. O Bino *mio*, O my love—what a very pleasant evening it is!

Bino. It is strange that I should be here, I who should be flying far away. After that parting from Bice, that sweet parting, how have I the heart to linger in this gay scene? It is gay. Where is that little wretch, our adorable hostess, the Vera? For no woman else would I linger so near the house, wherein I parted this morning from the sweetest creature of the world. Ah me! it is a night of stars; the ancient river grows young in the moonlight; the

air beats with the passion of a thousand mandolines. O beautiful night, I bless thee for the sake of my Bice. Perchance she leans from her window to the fragrant air of her garden, and whispers my name. Now she lays herself upon her little bed, and veils those violet eyes. Sleep little one, sleep while I watch. A sad and lonely vigil. Ah! the music! O Bice *mia*, to each cup which I shall quaff to-night, I will whisper one name, thy name. I will go quaff one now.—But who is this? A lady masked. If it should be the Vera. I dare swear 'tis she. I know her by a certain imperious trick of the elbow. I am never wrong in such matters. Will she know me? I think not. Now to go masquerading.—Fair lady!

Bice. Gentle cavalier!

Bino. What read you in the stars?

Bice. That day is done, sir.

Bino. But the light of love eternal.

Bice. It may be that the stars are eternal; it is certain that they are many.

Bino. And so unlike to love, who is but one.

Bice. Where did you learn to speak so cunningly ?

Bino. Here. I was dumb till I saw you.

Bice. By my lady's parrot 'twere a better compliment to have been stricken dumb by the sight.

Bino. Alas ! I have no gift of compliment.

I cannot flatter, no not I,

Oh no, not I ;

I am all truth, sweet harmony,

And love by-and-by.

Bice. Save us from song ! And yet beyond question you and I were born in one rhyming hour. For mark me now.

I cannot flatter, I am too true,

Oh much too true ;

I like a many, love but few,

And love not you.

Bino. Shield me, ye sacred Nine, who were every one a woman ! An improvising lady ! I am dumb before genius.

Bice. I can no more, sir. Once in twenty-four hours I am a poet for five minutes.

Bino. And I have known more famous bards
who were poets but once in ten years.

Bice. Indeed?

Bino. And that was in their youth. When the
hoary head was crowned, there was but prose in
the shrunken heart.

Bice. Are you a neglected poet?

Bino. Whether I am a poet, I know not. I
know that I am neglected, and chiefly by ladies.

Bice. There is a vile manner of boasting of your
successes.

Bino. Believe me, no. I speak in sober truth.

Bice. Truth and soberness! And you boasted
yourself a poet.

Bino. Never.

Bice. Have you no imagination? Speak poetry,
as you are a poet.

Bino. You will scorn me, as you are a woman.
But stay. I am possessed by the God. Now the
divine madness works. You draw poetry to you,
lady, as the moon the tide. Hush!

O dainty mask, like our Italian night,
Most beautiful, and hiding all but stars,
Whose is the face thou hidest from my sight?
—Would I could find some other rhyme than
“ wars.”

May wars never come between us.

Bice. My lips were not the first to frame the word.

Bino. Thy lips should frame things sweeter than mere speech.

Bice. I know no rhyme more gracious than, Absurd!

Bino. And I no rhyme less terrible than, Breach!

Bice. In truth, I fear you are but a camp-singer, for war and breach come quickest to your lips. You are no poet for a lady's chamber, to conjure a nap before dressing-time. Rather you should swagger in camp, and be clapped on the shoulder by comrade This and comrade That, with, “A draught of wine, my lad!” or, “A rousing song, my boy!” Ah, if you should be less a poet than a swashbuckler!

Bino. For it's ho ! wine ho !

And give me a flagon of wine,
Till here and there I go,—what ho !
And reeling to and fro,—what ho !

Dare swear the world is mine.

Bice. A kitchen-wench would cry “Good” to
those lines. They are well enough to call a tapster
—what ho !

Bino. O lady of the starry eyes,
O lady of the bitter tongue,
Lips should be taught more sweet replies,
While you and I are young.

Bice. Are you young ? Many a mask hides
wrinkles.

Bino. Not yours, on my life ! Your mouth is
not old.

Bice. No younger than my face, I give you my
word.

Bino. I believe you.

Bice. 'Tis a marvel if a man believes a woman.
We tell men the truth : they believe the opposite :

and so we deceive them very pleasantly, and our conscience is saved.

Bino. By your lips you are young.

Bice. You wear a mask on your mouth.

Bino. Nay, 'tis but an indifferent moustachio.

Bice. A most delicate fringe for fibs.

Bino. I know that you are pretty. Is not that true?

Bice. It is not true that you know it. I wear a mask.

Bino. I know whose face is under it.

Bice. No man in the city knows that.

Bino. But we are in fairyland, and I know.

A flower city, rose of all the earth,

Most naughty city if all tales be true,

To one true woman of true race gave birth,—

That truant true and dainty dame is—

Bice. Not I, in faith. There is no truth in poetry even when bad. I am not the Vera. I am but that Bice who is known to friendly citizens as Bice of the yellow hair.

Bino. Not you. On my life, you are not she.
And pray, how know you the lady?

Bice. So we tell men the truth, and they believe
the opposite. O most exquisite sweet gulls! And
you know this little Bice then, who I am not?

Bino. A little.

Bice. Is she so sharp of tongue as they say?

Bino. Her speech is gentle and her eyes soft.

Bice. So not like my eyes.

Bino. Your eyes! Why, they are afire with all
the mischief of Europe. They twinkle like two
naughty stars which love to cheat the mariner.

Bice. And yet they are the eyes of none other
than Bice.

Bino. Let me look closer.

Bice. Whose eyes are those that look?

Bino. None know better than you.

Bice. Whose?

Bino. Ah, the little imperious one! I will tell
you. I am the last man in this assembly who
should declare himself to-night, and for that suf-

ficient reason I will incontinently tell you that I am he.

Bice. Who?

Bino. He, who is more famous for his heels than his head, he who is the sworn comrade and boon companion of the duchess's ape, the prince of improvising rhymers, the loose ingredients of a poet, the pudding that never went into the bag, one who will eat green figs against any man or mule in Italy, the darling of his mother when his hair is dressed, the beloved of all ladies, himself more madman than lover, the one happy idler, and known to all decorous citizens from the father of the senate to the cook's new dog with the liver patch over his right eye, as Bino of the merry heart.

Bice. No! on my life you are not he.

Bino. And so you know this Bino!

Bice. A little. He left the city to-day.

Bino. Who bade him stay for this sweet night of revel?

Bice. He did not stay, believe me.

Bino. I am he, believe me or not as you will;
but you know it.

Bice. Stand in the moonlight.

Bino. Little princess, how you command me!
You bid me do what I ought not, and therefore
do I obey you.

O moon, my lady moon,
Sweet lady of the night
Lend me thy light,
And bid this fairer lady answer soon
If I am Messer Bino. Now behold!
Dian doth kiss me, and the tale is told.

*(He bares his face to the moonlight, and
there is silence between them.)*

Bice. You are not the Bino that I knew.

Bino. The only one of the world, the very para-
gon of philosophers.

Bice. My Bino was a truer man.

Bino. Thy Bino! And who gave him to thee?
But he is thine, all thine—for an hour or so.

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. You must not go till I have seen thee.
The stars have seen my face. Let them see thine
and learn to love.

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. And if it must be, well. I will not be so
unmannerly to hold a lady here against her will.
To our next merry meeting!

Bice. I leave the place to-morrow. Good-bye.

Bino. The whole city will follow you, from the
head of the Council to the cook's dog aforesaid,
lean princes and fat citizens, churches and palaces.
Why, the very bridges will run away with the
river. The city cannot be without you, or I can
breathe without breath. To our next merry meet-
ing!

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. By the town-clerk you have no more variety
than the cuckoo. Good-bye! Cuckoo!

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. Cuckoo!

(*As Bice passes away into shadow, one of the big windows is darkened by a band of revellers, who pour forth on to the terrace with laughter and riot. As they flit in the moonlight with snatches of song, they leave the Vera alone in the window. She stands distinct against the yellow glare, which touches her hair with flame, but the moonshine is uncertain on her face. Is it she or the tremulous light that is laughing? Bino looks at her, and sees a witch or a ghost. As he stands staring, the masks come laughing once more, dancing with arms entwined, and bearing onward in their midst Bice, half-unwilling. As Bino goes quickly to them, they wheel away and leave the lady standing. Once again they darken the yellow light of the window, and when they are gone, the Vera is seen there no more.*)

Bino. By magic and moonshine, lady, who are you ?

Bice. Am I not the Vera ?

Bino. No.

Bice. Alas, no ! I am not gay, nor witty, nor pretty.

Bino. I cannot see, but I know that you are fairer than she.

Bice. You like me, then ?

Bino. Like ! The word is colder than the breath of Boreas. There is no such word in my language. I adore you.

Bice. You will add me to the list ? O joy ! Quick with your tablets. List of fair ladies beloved by Messer Bino :—

1. The Vera.
2. The unknown of the mask.
3. Bice the biondina.

Bino. Bice !

Bice. Ay, so they say. But I doubt if she be fair enough to grace the triumph of so great a conqueror. I have heard that she is crooked.

Bino. It was not true.

Bice. That her tongue is too sharp.

Bino. The kindest speech in Europe.

Bice. That her hair was not always so yellow.

Bino. The angels wove it of sunbeams.

Bice. The Graces help us! He has an attack of poetry. And so this little Bice is still on the list. Strike out the fair unknown; and so once more Good-bye.

Bino. I love all ladies. Leave me not alone.

Bice. A devouring monster!

Bino. Nay, I am but like Cerberus, with three pairs of lips.

Bice. A most monstrous similitude. For see how far you must ever be from the gates of Paradise.

Bino. I am near thee.

Bice. Stand back, faithless man!

Bino. I am all faith.

Bice. For all women.

Bino. But I love in degrees. I pray you, let me see your face.

Bice. Swear that I have no rival, and I unmask.

Bino. How can I swear it?

Bice. With your triple mouth, and in each a double tongue. I am jealous of this Bice, with her hair woven of sunbeams, forsooth.

Bino. Put back your hood, and I will praise your locks more prettily.

Bice. It is said that you are promised to this Bice.

Bino. And you believe it?

Bice. It is said that she is beautiful.

Bino. Not beside thee. I pray thee, show thy face.

Bice. That she is very wise.

Bino. Believe me, no. Unmask.

Bice. Then she is ill-favoured, foolish, and you love her not.

Bino. Yes, yes. Now let me look on thee.

Bice. O moon, my lady moon,

Sweet lady of the night,

Lend me thy light,

And bid this exquisite gay masker swoon

At sight of hair the angels wove from gold ;
Dian doth kiss me, and the tale is told.

*(She bares her face to the moonlight, and there
is silence between them.)*

Bino. Bice !

Bice. Ill-favoured, foolish, and unloved.

Bino. Bice !

Bice. Most wearisome iteration. Cuckoo !

Bino. What shall I say ?

Bice. Nothing.

Bino. What can I do ?

Bice. Nothing but go.

Bino. O Bice, spare me ! I love none but you.

Bice. And the masked lady.

Bino. I was but curious, no more.

Bice. Have men no vices that they must rob woman
of her only fault ? Leave curiosity to us.

Bino. Bice, if you love me——

Bice. I love you not.

Bino. Forgive me.

Bice. No. Good-bye.

Bino. Good-bye. But stay. Something puzzles me. Why are you here?

Bice. I? Because the Vera sent for me.

Bino. And I for the same reason.

Bice. No. I came for my pleasure.

Bino. And I for mine.

Bice. Most wickedly.

Bino. And you?

Bice. } How could you think of pleasure on the
Bino. } very day of our parting?

Bino. I always think of pleasure. I was made so.
Is it very wrong to be happy?

Bice. Perhaps not. Alas! I am womanly weak in argument.

Bino. I will reason and you shall love. The head and the heart are best together.

Bice. We are young. It is not wrong to be young.

Bino. And we love each other.

Bice. To love is one thing, to laugh is another.

Bino. Yet love and laughter fly well together, as the doves of Venus.

Bice. Can you laugh with all, and love but one?

Bino. I have. I do. I will.

Bice. I will too.

Bino. There are a myriad stars, and but one moon.

Bice. There are many nights in the year, but never another like this.

Bino. It is a night for dancing.

Bice. It is a night for laughter.

Bino. It is a night for love.

Bice. For mandoline, guitar, quick vows, and quick forgetting.

Bino. For countless ripples of folly and one deep sea of love.

Bice. Let us dance.

Bino. Let us be happy together.

Bice. Joyous together, and not unhappy apart.

Bino. Never apart and ever happy. Let us dance.

So they flit in the moonlight: the Vera comes

stepping through the window, but they see her not : behind her the masks are peering. The music swells forth triumphant, and slowly dies to silence : the lights in the palace grow faint and fainter, and die : a mist creeps up from the river : a cloud goes over the moon : there is night and nothing more.

A FALSE START



A FALSE START.

Harry. I am hungry. Can I live another half-hour on a cup of coffee? Half an hour! I'll stand it somehow. I'll starve myself every morning for Nora's sake. I'll sacrifice myself every hour of the day for Nora's sake. I'll—— I wonder where she got this notion of breakfasting in the foreign fashion; as if I hadn't had enough of foreigners and their fashions! I did think that when I married I should leave all that nonsense with my mother in Paris, and come home and live like a Briton; and eat ham and eggs at nine o'clock, and a muffin—a muffin! Oh, but Nora wishes it, and she shall never know that I don't delight in waiting for my

breakfast till twelve o'clock. Clara Roedale would never believe it of me. I always knew that marriage would bring out the finer parts of my character. I am married, and the finer parts of my character are brought out. Muffin! There's nothing eatable about here! One can't eat coal. A paper knife! No. By George, there was a biscuit somewhere—yesterday! Yes—there certainly was a biscuit in my greatcoat-pocket. I can be cheerful with a biscuit; and Nora shall never know what I suffer for her sake.

*(Harry goes in search of the biscuit; and
Nora comes in search of her husband.)*

Nora. Harry! Harry! Where can he be? Oh, I am famished, and I am glad of it! Harry, it is for your sake that I endure these torments. You shall never have reason to say that you resigned the easy habits of Continental life for the sake of a little girl like me. Your friend Lady Roedale

—dear Lady Roedale—shall never be able to say that I put a stop to a single one of your delightful bachelor amusements. You shall smoke everywhere. I will beg and implore you to go to your horrid club. I will teach myself to dote upon your absence. I will learn to like tobacco. I will starve myself every day till noon. I will—— Oh, if I could only find the smallest morsel of bread! Half an hour more! no; only six-and-twenty minutes! Courage! That's Harry's step. With him I could go without breakfast for ever. Always meet your husband with a smile. That's Clara Roedale's golden rule. I will smile, if I die for it.

H. (as he comes in). Ah, Nora! Why, what's the matter, dear? What an odd smile you've got!

N. Have I, dear? I was thinking of you.

H. Thanks, Nora; you don't know what an awfully clever dog your Moppet is.

N. Isn't he clever?

H. Fancy his getting a biscuit out of my great-coat-pocket!

N. Did he really? The clever darling! Are you quite sure?

H. I saw the crumbs on the floor.

N. You speak quite sentimentally about it.

H. Oh yes, it's quite pathetic—this sagacity of dumb animals. Isn't it a lovely morning? I've been round the garden and the meadow.

N. To get an appetite for breakfast?

H. No—that is, I'm hungry enough,—I'm not *very* hungry.

N. Of course not. Nineteen minutes and a half!

H. What, dear?

N. Nothing. Is there anything in the paper?

H. I don't know.

N. Haven't you read the paper? I thought that every man began the day by reading the paper.

H. Began the day!

N. Don't you read the papers?

H. I always read my paper after breakfast.

(Here is a pause full of emotion.)

N. Did you remember to order the carriage?

H. Yes, dear.

N. Isn't it a lovely day for the picnic? I am so glad! I do so love tea on the rocks!

H. Tea! Oh! And a muffin!

N. What's the matter, Harry?

H. Nothing, dear.—I think I feel it less if I keep moving.

N. You *do* like picnics, don't you, Harry?

H. I'm awfully fond of picnics. (*Walking up and down he murmurs to himself*)—Clara Roedale wouldn't believe it of me. Picnics! Fancy anybody liking a picnic!

N. I think it seems better if I walk about. (*Walking up and down she murmurs to herself*)—He shan't be shut up at home with his dull little wife; he shall have all the social pleasures to which he is accustomed. Harry, dear, were you what they call an ornament of society?

H. I don't know. Was I?—Nora!

N. What?

H. Why are we walking up and down like two tigers at the Zoo?

N. Is it a riddle, dear? I will try to guess it later—after breakfast.

H. Breakfast? Breakfast? Yes, that reminds me; it must be nearly breakfast-time.

N. Not quite. Are you ready for breakfast?

H. Oh yes—I think so, if you are.

N. You are sure it's not too early for you?

H. Not a bit. But you? Would you like to have it now if it's ready?

N. I really think I should—if you are quite sure that you would not like it later.

H. I don't think so.

N. (*heroically*). Harry, shall I put it off for half an hour?

H. As you please, dear. (*He sinks into a chair.*)

(*Here is a pause full of emotion.*)

N. If breakfast is ready, it may be spoiled by

being kept; and then you wouldn't like it. Shall I go and see if it's ready?

H. Perhaps you like it spoiled.

N. What an idea! (*At the door*)—Oh, how delicious!

H. (*as he joins her*). Isn't it good? Let me go and see if it's ready. (*He goes out.*)

N. He was an ornament of society. I know it. Shall I be so wickedly selfish as to deprive society of its most brilliant ornament? The more I dote on a quiet life with Harry, and nobody else; the more I hate outside people, and dressing up, and dancing about; the more I hate those odious picnics with spiders—oh, how afraid I am of a spider!—the more certain I am that it is my duty to pretend to like them all, to dissemble for Harry's sake, and for the sake of society. Yes, Harry, you shall go to a picnic every day, if I die for it. I think I am dying. I feel thin—very, very thin. I think I am going to faint.

*(Here Harry appears leaning in the doorway,
pale and faint.)*

H. Nora! the cook wants to speak to you.

N. Oh, Harry, is anything the matter?

H. I don't know.

(She goes out; he sinks into a chair.)

If I could get something to eat, some breakfast, I could face this picnic. I would go cheerfully to a picnic—even to a picnic. How I used to long for rest! When I chose a little girl in the country, I fancied a sort of ballet life,—all cream and roses, and jam, and a cigar under a tree, with sheep about, and—and rest. It was like my abominable selfishness. Nora has never had any fun. Of course Nora would like to have some fun. Of course Nora shall have some fun; and I'll pretend to like it. Fun! Turning round and round in a crowd, and being kicked on the ankles! Eating lobster-salad and ices at three o'clock in the morning! Talking to

a girl about another girl's eyes, and staring into hers! Fun!—the treadmill's a joke to it. And yet all this and more will I go through for the sake of my little Nora—all except that eye business. Nora shall taste the pleasures of society; and I'll pretend to enjoy them. By George, I will enjoy them!

(When his voice has sunk to the depth of tragic gloom, Nora runs in.)

N. Breakfast is ready.

H. Ah!

(They go away lovingly to breakfast. After a while Lady Roedale is shown in by the footman.)

Lady Roedale. At breakfast, are they? Don't tell them I am here. I can wait. *(The footman goes away.)* It is always easy to wait. Perhaps it will amuse me to take the young couple by surprise. There really is something funny in young married

people. They are so delightfully important. I sometimes fancy that I've got what clever people call a sense of humour. I am sure I smile at all these flutterings, and billings and cooings, and solemn calculations about the expense of a nest. The theme's old as Adam, but the variations are endless. I like to see little mistress adjusting her fads to young master's hobbies; I like this much ado about a brace of nothings; I like young couples. One must go in for something. Susan Lorimer breaks her poor head over cracked china: I should puzzle my brain, if I had one, over young couples; they are quite as interesting—quite. Certainly I have no reason to like the married state. Ugh! but that's all over long ago. I like to view it from outside. I become absurdly interested in the marriages of Tom, Dick, and Harry—especially Harry. Harry was a very nice boy—devoted to me. There's nothing so good for that sort of boy as a devotion to a steady, sensible woman—a good, solid, middle-aged person. There's no knowing what might have become of Harry if

THE END

Susan Lorimer had got hold of him before I did. Susan is so theatrical—always in the fourth act of the last French comedy—always on the razor's edge. It's fun for her; but it might have been death to Harry. Now I studied him. I understood him. I saw what he was fit for. I just put him into shape a little; and I married him to the best little girl in the world. I haven't done anything which pleased me so much since I married Claud Huntley to that dear little thing in Rome. Nothing could have turned out better than that. She spoils him; and he is not so amusing since his temper improved; but still it's a great success; and he owes it all to me. I have half a mind to open an office. It's quite interesting to make matches. It's so experimental. There's something quite grand about it: it's patriarchal and biblical; it's like the ark—or fancy poultry.

H. (as he comes in). Clara! Lady Roedale!

Lady R. Harry, as you horrid boys say, how goes it?

H. As we horrid boys say, it simply walks in. And what on earth brings you here?

Lady R. Reasons are tiresome. You ought to say that you are glad.

H. I'm awfully glad.

Lady R. My doctor recommends the society of young people. I suppose you know that I am antediluvian, and ushered the animals into the ark.

H. Jolly for the animals! How pleased Nora will be! Come and have some breakfast.

Lady R. Thank you. I breakfast in the morning.

H. H'm. I don't.

Lady R. You used to be an absurdly early creature—up with the foolish lark.

H. Ah, yes. But you see Nora likes to breakfast at twelve, and so of course I——

Lady R. Of course you! Oh, Harry, this is profoundly interesting. Do you do just what Nora likes in everything?

H. Yes. You didn't think it of me, did you? You thought all men were selfish, didn't you? Don't you remember telling me that all the men you ever knew — all your admirers, you know—

were all selfish,—dark and fair, fat and thin, comic and gloomy, the whole lot of 'em—all alike in being selfish?

Lady R. Very likely.

H. Well? Look at me. Whatever turns up, I simply look at it in one way. I ask, What will Nora like? Then I pretend what she likes is what I like.

Lady R. H'm. You tell fibs?

H. One must, you know.

Lady R. Must one?

H. Little unselfish sort of fibs, you know. I was in agony for two hours before breakfast, and I enjoyed it. I remembered where there was a biscuit, and Nora's infernal little beast of a dog had eaten it—and I enjoyed that! Now we are off to a picnic—and I mean to enjoy that!

Lady R. My dear Harry, even you must have passed the picnic age—ants and indigestion. But of course you don't mean to say that you are going off to a picnic when I have come to see you?

H. You must come too. You know her. It's your friend Mrs Lorimer.

Lady R. Susan Lorimer?

H. She is a friend of yours, isn't she?

Lady R. Oh yes, she's one of my oldest friends. I've known her for ever. She's a most dangerous woman. You must throw her over.

H. But Nora? Nora's wild about this picnic.

Lady R. She's wilder about me. Call her, and we'll see.

(Harry calls her, and she presently comes in.)

N. Lady Roedale! Oh, I *am* glad. Have you come to stay with us?

Lady R. No, dear; only to spend the day.

N. Oh, I *am* sorry. How unlucky! Has Harry told you about our engagement?

H. Yes, and I want her to come too—you'd like that, wouldn't you, Nora? I thought I was sure you'd like it.

Lady R. It's impossible. I couldn't go in these things.

H. Why, you look stunning.

N. I am sure that that gown will do perfectly.

Lady R. Thanks, dear. I have passed the age of gowns that "will do perfectly." Don't you think you could throw over Susan Lorimer for me? I am sure nobody can like her better than me.

N. Lady Roedale!

Lady R. Am I too old to be called Clara? Your husband always calls me Clara.

N. Does he?

Lady R. He always was an impertinent boy. Come, my dear, you need not mind offending Susan Lorimer; she is sure to abuse you any way. You can write a line and say that an aged friend has come unexpectedly, and you can't leave her; and you can stay at home and give the aged friend some luncheon.

N. Well, you see, dear, Harry—the fact is, I am so afraid that he should give up going out and

seeing his friends. I should like to stay at home with you, but Harry——

H. Oh, I don't care to go! I mean—if you *really mean*, Nora, that you'd like to stay at home, I shouldn't mind. I should be awfully glad to stay at home with Clara.

N. Oh, Harry, I thought you were *so* eager to go!

H. Oh yes, yes—of course,—I know I said so,—but—but, you see——

N. But what, Harry?

H. Why, you see Clara's coming makes all the difference. But look here; are you *quite* sure that *you* don't care to go? Of course if you care to go—if you care the least bit——

N. Oh no. Why should I? Pray don't consider me.

H. Not consider you! Why, Nora——

N. (*to Lady Roedale*). Won't you come up to my room and take your things off?

Lady R. Then it's all settled. You stay with

me. I am sure I am doing you both a very good turn—by saving you from one of Susan Lorimer's picnics.

(She goes away with Nora; Harry is left alone and in perplexity.)

H. What on earth is the matter with Nora?—"Pray don't consider me." Doesn't she know that I spend every hour of the day in considering her; that the only thing I care for is to do everything to please her—to give up everything to her? doesn't she know—no, by George! of course she doesn't know. That would spoil it all. I go on the principle of doing everything she likes, and making her think it's what I like: that's my cunning. Perhaps she really wants to go on this infernal chicken-feed. *(He goes to Nora as she comes in.)* Look here, Nora! are you sure you'd rather stay at home?

N. I am quite content. And you? Your conversion was a little sudden.

H. My conversion!

N. Just before breakfast you were dying to go to this picnic.

H. Was I? Oh yes, but—but you see, Clara ——

N. Yes, I see Clara. Just because *she* comes, you care for nothing but staying at home with her. You couldn't bear the idea of staying at home with me.

(Here Lady Roedale comes in; but they don't see her.)

H. Nora! By George! Here! I say! What shall I say? I didn't want to go. I never wanted to go on the infernal picnic. I hate 'em.

N. Then you were deceiving me.

H. I pretended to want to go, because you wanted to go.

N. I didn't think I should be deceived so soon.

H. Nora!

N. How can I tell when you are speaking the truth? No: I believe you are deceiving me now. You did want to go till *she* came, and now you pretend you didn't.

H. Nora, don't; I say, Nora, don't. On my honour I hate picnics. I was going solely for your sake.

N. That can't be true; for I was going solely for your sake.

H. Well then, by George, you were deceiving me!

N. Oh, it's too much! Oh that I should be accused of deceiving my husband! Stay at home, since you prefer it; stay at home with her—and be agreeable to her;—don't stop me! my heart is broken: oh! oh! oh!

H. Where are you going? Nora! where are you going?

N. To the picnic!

*(She goes away without seeing Lady Roedale ;
but now Harry sees her.)*

H. Good heavens! Clara! What's this?

Lady R. Nothing.

H. Nothing?

Lady R. I don't think you understand women.

H. I thought I did.

Lady R. Poor boy! you never will.

H. What shall I do?

Lady R. Never tell fibs to your wife.

H. Oh!

Lady R. You have been playing the Jesuit.

H. By George, it's all my fault! I see it all. Nora's quite right; she's the best and sweetest-tempered—but oh, Lady Roedale, I never thought I should see her in a rage. It's awful!

Lady R. Awful! I only wish I could be in a rage with anybody.

H. What?

Lady R. Let me see. It must be at least ten years since I lost my temper. There's nothing worth being angry about nowadays.

H. I suppose I don't understand women.

Lady R. And never will.

H. But what am I to do? I must do something. Oh, Clara, don't you see that the happiness of my life is at stake?

Lady R. Oh dear me, you must have been reading novels. Men ought not to read novels; they take them too seriously. Sit down like a good boy and read the paper. Yes, I am going to exert myself for your sake. I shall be back in a few minutes. Now this is almost exciting. This is certainly better than china—or chickens.

(She goes out and leaves Harry alone.)

H. On the next few minutes may depend the happiness of my life. What an awful thing this marriage is! And I went into it as if I were taking a girl down to supper. It's awful! I thought I knew all about Nora; I suppose I knew nothing at all. Good heavens! I wonder what she is! Good heavens! Fancy me wondering what sort of a woman my wife is—my own wife! It's awful! I wonder if any man ever went through such an experience before! I have married a what-d'-ye-call-it—a Phoenix—a Pelican; no—those are insur-

ance offices : a sphinx—that's it—a sphinx. Nora is a sphinx ! Why did not Clara tell me ? She knows all about marriages and such things. She might have told me it wasn't all cake and satin slippers. Is that a gown on the stairs ? How my heart beats ! I must be a man ! I must nerve myself for a terrible scene.

(He nerves himself ; the ladies come in chatting and smiling ; but Nora's eyes are red.)

N. Then you really think olive-green would be best ?

Lady R. Much the best.

N. Harry, dear, Clara thinks olive-green for the dining-room. I told her you thought a Japanesy sort of blue.

H. Did I, dear ? Blue ? Yes, dear—of course ; you are so fond of blue, and I——

Lady R. Harry, did you say blue because it is Nora's favourite colour ? No fibs !

H. Yes.

Lady R. Nora! Is blue your favourite colour?

N. I am very fond of a nice blue.

Lady R. Was it your favourite colour before you married?

N. Oh yes, really and truly, before that.

Lady R. Before you saw Harry?

N. I—I—I don't remember; I think not.

Lady R. Harry, turn to the light. I thought so. Blue necktie! A Japanesy sort of blue! He always wears blue neckties. Oh, you young people, how profoundly wicked you both are! I can't preach without food. Won't you give me some luncheon?

N. Oh yes, Clara. Why, you poor dear, I forgot; I never thought of it. We've only just breakfasted.

Lady R. Oh dear! And you breakfast at this preposterous hour to please Harry?

N. I don't mind it; I don't really mind it—much. You see Harry has lived so much abroad. and——

Lady R. That is enough. Harry, do you starve yourself for hours in the morning for Nora's sake?

H. You know; I told you; yes. I thought Nora liked it.

Lady R. Really it's an interesting study. I suppose I ought to print a "royal road to connubial felicity." I wonder if these young people are very good or very bad? They were making a great mess of it till I came.

H. Nora, you are not very angry with me?

N. Oh, Harry dear, I will never tell you anything but the whole truth. It was all my fault.

H. No, no; it was all mine.

Lady R. They are both telling fibs again. May I ask about that luncheon?

N. Oh, I beg your pardon; I am so sorry! Will you have it here?

H. Why, there's the carriage; I never countermanded it. What was I thinking about?

Lady R. Thinking about? You were probably thinking that the happiness of your life was at stake.

Since the carriage is here, suppose we make Harry drive us out of the glare. I should like to have luncheon somewhere in the wood.

N. Oh yes; that will be nice.

H. A picnic!

Lady R. No, no; no picnic! Nora shall send a little note to Susan Lorimer. No picnic; only luncheon in the open air.

H. I don't understand women.

Lady R. And never will. But we have had enough of that little comedy.

H. Comedy! It wasn't very funny to me.

Lady R. It amused me. But enough is as good as a feast—a great deal better than one of Susan Lorimer's picnics.

N. What little comedy do you mean, Clara?

Lady R. Never mind, dear; it's finished, and that's always something. I ring down the curtain on that little comedy.



THE LATIN LESSON

BOY AND GIRL



THE LATIN LESSON.

BOY AND GIRL.

Tommy. Isn't this a ripping place? It seems to me as if the downs were like great green waves, rolling along and swelling bigger and bigger; and here we are, you and I, up on the very top of the biggest wave of all, which hangs here for ever, as if it would plunge down the next moment and swamp the real old sea.

Sybil. What nonsense you do talk, Tommy! Come; it's quite time I began my lesson. What's this book, which you say I can read?

T. The anthology.

S. The what?

T. The anthologia Latina.

S. What's that?

T. Oh, I don't know; it's a sort of collection. It's good for girls, because it leaves out the bad things.

S. But I want to read what boys read.

T. You can't, you know. We have to read awfully improper things at school.

S. I don't see why it is good for you to read things which it isn't good for me to read. I don't see why girls should be different from boys.

T. I don't see why either. I suppose it's best. I think I am glad you are different.

S. Do let us begin. You are so idle.

T. It's so awfully jolly doing nothing up here. I should like to lie here for ever on this nice short grass and stare at the sea. Isn't the sea dazzling in the sunlight? It looks like millions of penknives.

S. Penknives! It's like diamonds.

T. Should you like to have millions of diamonds? I wish I were a fellow in the 'Arabian Nights,' and I would give 'em to you.

S. I don't wish for anything so silly. Do sit up, and let us begin.

T. Oh, very well. Here you are; I picked out this for you to read. It's all correct; it's about the death of a sparrow.

S. Well?

T. Well—I say, Sybil, I wish the brim of your hat was a little wider.

S. Why?

T. Because, as we have got to look over the same book, it would be jolly to sit in the shade of the same hat. We should be like Paul and Virginia.

S. Who were they?

T. They were young people who were in love with each other—in an opera, or something.

S. How silly! Come now; do begin.

T. You must begin; see if you can translate it. I've got a stunning translation of it in my pocket; my tutor made it.

S. "Lament, o——"

T. "Venuses and Cupids——"

S. But there was only one Venus.

T. Oh, that don't matter. It's a sort of poetic licence; these poets have to make it scan, you know. I can't make out the next line; and I can't make out my tutor's translation of it: but it don't matter; it's only a fill-up. Go on at "passer."

S.—The sparrow of my girl is dead,
The sparrow—"deliciæ"—

T. (*reads from his tutor's translation*)—

The sparrow of my dearest girl is dead,
The sparrow, darling of my dear, is dead;
Whom more than her own eyes she lovèd so,
For he was honey-voiced; and he would know
His mistress, as a girl her mother dear;
Nor from her gentle bosom would he go,
But hopping round about, now there, now here,
He piped to her alone most sweet and clear.

S. There's nothing about "sweet and clear" in the Latin.

T. You are so awfully particular, Sybil. I wish it wasn't all about a sparrow. I don't care for sparrows. Ah! look at that lark. He got up quite close to us. That's what I call a bird. Phew! doesn't he jump? What great leaps he goes up in! Mustn't he be tremendously happy? Fancy being able to go like that, and having wind enough to sing all the time!

S. I wish you wouldn't let your eyes wander all over the country. If you don't keep them on the book we shall never get on.

T. All right. This other's a jolly one—this one—
"To Lesbia."

S. Who was Lesbia?

T. She was the girl who had the sparrow; he was in love with her: but you had better not think of her; I believe she wasn't at all a good sort.

S. What a pity!

T. She made him awfully unhappy.

S. It was his own fault. I can't think why people fall in love.

T. Of course it's awfully silly to fall in love.

S. I think it's horrid.

T. People say that a man and a woman can't be friends, because one of them is sure to fall in love.

S. That must be nonsense. Look at you and me! We have been friends for ever so long.

T. Yes; and do you know, Sybil, I'd rather you were my friend than any chap I know.

S. It seems very hard, this "To Lesbia." What's the meaning of "basiationes"?

T. I think it means "kisses."

S. Oh!

T. "You ask how many of your kisses, Lesbia, are enough and more than enough for me. As great as is the number of Lybian sand in spice-bearing Cyrenæ, between the oracle of — something — Jove and the sepulchre of old Battus, or as many as are the stars that——"

S. Oh, we won't go on with that. Poets are always so silly when they begin to talk about those things. I do wish you would finish one thing before you begin another; you——

T. "It's good to be off with the old love before you are on with the new——"

S. Tommy!

T. All right. I'll attend awfully well now. Go on; see if you can do it. Go on with Mr Spadger.

S. "Who now goes through the way—tenebricosum?——"

T. "Full of shadows."

S. "Thither, whence they deny anybody to return."

T. That's right. You really do know a lot of Latin. I say, do you think that Clara could be friends with a boy without trying to make him in love with her? Clara isn't a bit like you.

S. Clara is very pretty.

T. Do you think she is prettier than Marion?

S. Clara is prettiest; but Marion has so much character.

T. Marion could be friends with a boy.

S. Friends with a boy! What an expression! What bad English you do talk!

T. I always do when I am happy. One can't be jolly grammatically. I think Marion doesn't care about boys.

S. Indeed? Suppose we go on with our "sparrow."

T. I should like her to like me.

S. Oh! What is the meaning of "Orci"?

T. "Orci!" Let me see the book. Oh, "Orcus" is—at least it isn't really what we mean when we—I'll see how my tutor puts it. Ah!

Ill hap befall ye, shades of grim despair,

Who glut yourselves with all things that are fair!

Ah! he shirks the difficulty: it's just like him.

S. You surely don't think Marion pretty, do you?

T. I don't know.

S. You must have very funny taste if you do. Now, Clara is pretty, if you like.

T. Yes; isn't Clara pretty? My word! isn't she pretty?

S. Yes; of course she's pretty.

T. What are you staring out to sea like that for? Are you looking at that sail?

S. I was thinking that some friend might be on board that ship. How strange it would be! Fancy if Mr Redgrave were coming home on that ship!

T. Redgrave! What on earth makes you think of that old chappy?

S. How ridiculous you are, Tommy! He isn't a bit old; and I think he's very handsome.

T. He's a jolly old humbug. When he's playing tennis with me, he's as lively as possible; but when he's with the women, he looks sentimental, and makes eyes: and as for his not being old, he must be thirty if he's a day.

S. That I am sure he can't be. I am sure he is quite young. Of course he isn't a boy.

T. Well, I don't mind being a boy. I wouldn't be a man for anything; and if I was, I wouldn't be a flirt.

S. Don't be horrid, Tommy. Poor Mr Redgrave has been very unhappy. That is what makes him look like that. He was in love with the most beautiful lady in the world; and she was very cruel, and married a millionaire or something.

T. I don't see anything cruel in marrying a millionaire or something. He told you all this precious story, did he?

S. No; Aunt Adelaide told me that: but he told me——

T. What did *he* tell you?

S. Oh, it was one day when he was laughing with Aunt Adelaide about women; and he turned to me and said with a melancholy smile——

T. I know it. Like this!

S. Not a bit like that. He said, with a very sweet and melancholy smile, that I must take care not to be a flirt, because some day I might do a great deal of mischief; and that women ought to try to do good to people, and not harm.

T. Some day! That means when you are a young lady. I know I shan't like you when you are a young lady. I hate young ladies.

S. Marion is almost a young lady.

T. Ah, but she's different.

S. It's ridiculous of you to say that Marion's pretty.

T. I never said she was pretty. I said that she wasn't as pretty as Clara.

S. You are a horrid disagreeable boy, any way. You have always made such a pretence of——

T. Of what?

S. Of thinking me your very best friend.

T. Then why do you go talking about that old Redgrave?

S. You are very disagreeable; and I shall go home.

T. No, no; don't go. It's so jolly here. Let's solemnly promise to be each other's very best friend.

S. Till when?

T. For ever and ever.

S. I should like to show these stupid people that a man and a woman can be friends without caring about each other one bit!

T. Ye-es. Only I don't know what you'll be like, when you are a young lady.

S. I shan't be that for ever so long. I don't think I shall be old, or begin to think that I am old, till I am twenty.

T. I am afraid you will be awfully pretty when you are a young lady.

S. Don't be silly, Tommy.

T. Any way, you'll like me better than old Redgrave?

S. Of course. And you'll like me better than Marion?

T. Yes.

S. And Clara?

T. Ever so much better than Clara.

S. Very well, then.

T. What do you mean by "Very well, then"?

S. That is settled; and now I can go on with my lesson.

T. But we've almost polished off poor Mr Sparrow.

S. What a way to talk!

T. It don't do for a girl. You have to say "prunes" and "precision" all day to make your mouth pretty.

S. Tommy, you are exceedingly silly; and it's better to say "prunes" than to chew grass; and if

you ain't going to look at the book instead of staring out to sea, I shall go home.

T. All right, Sybil. We'll do him up in less than a jiffy out of my tutor's translation. Here you are:—

Ill hap befall ye, shades of grim despair,
Who glut yourselves with all things that are fair!
How fair the little bird ye reft from me!
O deed ill done! Poor little bird, for thee—
For thy dear sake my girl's sweet eyes are red,
And swollen all with tears that thou art dead!

By George, it is most awfully touching! isn't it, Sybil? Fancy how long ago the poor little beast died, and here we are still sorry!

S. "Little beast!"

T. Oh, look! far away across the sea, do you see that tiny little sail? Fancy if it was my ship coming in!

S. You are the strangest boy.

T. Shouldn't I just like to have a ship? I wish

it was ever so long ago ; and that I might sail away and fight a Spaniard.

S. I should like to know what the Spaniards have ever done to you, that you should want to fight them.

T. I don't know ; but I'm sure it would be jolly good fun to fight a Spaniard.

S. That is so like a boy. Perhaps you would never come back——

T. No more ! Oh yes, I should turn up : and I'd bring you back a jolly lot of things too—a ship full of apes and——

S. Tommy !

T. Oh, apes are a detail : they come in with ivory, and peacocks, and all sorts of stunning things ; and diamonds from the diamond-fields ; and silver from the silver mountains ; and gold dust from the golden rivers ; and parrots and paroquets, and a Red Indian princess in feathers, and——

S. Tommy, how can you be so ridiculous ?

T. You wait till I do it. I'll just go back to

school next half to get a little more football, and then I'm off; and I'll bring you back a hundred ostrich-tails to put on your head when you go to Court; and I'll have a beard down to my waist; and I'll kill sparrows on the wing with a pistol in either hand you like; and I'll marry you, and the Indian princess will die of jealousy, and——

S. Tommy! I think you are going mad. It must be the sun.

T. Not very mad.

S. Then don't talk any more nonsense. It's quite time to go home.

T. Home's the word; and I'll carry the book. Poor Master Sparrow. "*Lugete o Veneres Cupidinesque!*"



HALF-WAY TO ARCADY



HALF-WAY TO ARCADY.

*A Poet dressed in evening clothes, but somewhat dusty,
meets an Arcadian girl upon the road.*

He. Here, child ! Is this the way to Arcady ?

She. Yes, noble lord.

He.

No noble lord am I.

I am a poet, and a weary one.

Give me a drink of water. Child, the sun

Will fleck that dainty skin with golden kisses,

Termed freckles by our milk-of-almond misses.

Turn from the glaring road a little space :

The spreading beech will shade the dimpled face,

The frolic face, a light in shady nook :
Nay, do not fear ! It has been mine to look
On many million women ; therefore I,
Or partly therefore, go to Arcady.

She. But there are women in Arcadia.

He. Are there ? To lead the yokel hearts
astray,—

And mine, perhaps. Ah me ! to lie along
A little brook, a shepherd from a song,
A little babbling brook, and plait the reeds,
To watch the dance young Amaryllis leads,
To hum a catch of Pan and Nymph and Faun
Laughing and leaping on the upland lawn,
To taste pure milk, to sleep before the sun,
Wake with the sheep and with the sheep-dog run,
To plunge in brawling stream, rest on the sod
As free and naked as a woodland god—
Ah, to be there ! How far is't ?

She.

Let me see.

Fair sir, since sunrise I've walked steadily—

He. You come from Arcady ?

She.

Of course, my lord.

He. Poor child! and you have left the land
adored

By sheep and poets. Say, what cruel fate
Has sent you thence to wander desolate
In this cramped world of licence, law, and lie?

She. What sent me? No one sent me, sir; but I
Was grown so weary of the silly sheep
And silly shepherds—oh, they peer and peep,
And sing their songs all to one lazy tune
Of ribbons and of roses, and warm June;
And bells are always tinkling, breezes sighing
For nothing, and the leaves so long a-dying—
And so, sir, I was tired and ran away.

He. Where do you go?*She.*

To Paris, and to day,

To life, to life!—Oh pardon me, fair sir,
I talk too much.

He.

I like those lips astir

With funny little fancies, rosebud lips,
A rose of dew; and now a sunbeam slips

Through frolic beech-leaves—for a kiss I ween ;
Now the lips part, and so he slips between.
You sit so meek and pretty in the shade,
Were I not tired of women, I'm afraid
That I should learn of sunbeams—nay, don't fear me,
I've seen so many pretty women near me.
Fold little hands, turn great grave eyes on mine,
And I will teach you wisdom,—how they shine,
Those solemn eyes ! and are they blue or brown ?—
'Tis good to live afar from noisy town,
To live a simple life in woodland wild,
Child in a child's world, evermore a child ;
'Tis good to cut the reed and sound the lay,
To lead the sheep, and watch the lambkins play.

She. Oh, sir, I've watched the lambkins, and the game
Our lambkins play is every day the same ;
I'm weary of their dance.

He. The lark at morn
Leaps, a live song, above the yellow corn ;
The hours go by to music ; when the sun
Slopes to the west, their day-long pleasures done,

The simple souls betake themselves to rest—
Blest race indeed if they but knew how blest.

She. Ah, sir, but what are days and days like
these

To Paris hours and gaslight in the trees—
A glare, a maze, a murmur?

He. Listen, child!

In that old shell of Paris was I styled
Prince of misrule, mirth, madness, mockery.
No lord of laughter half so loud as I;
No cup so deep as mine, no heart so gay.
Do I look very happy?

She. Dare I say?

Dare I speak out my thought? Fair sir, your face
Has in it something that did never grace
Our most sweet-smiling shepherd: I can guess
That it is what we long for—weariness.
There's no life to grow weary of at home.

He. Each year the apple-orchards break to foam
Of sun-tipped blossom, every leaf is new
On every tree, and all the sky is blue.

Slowly the fresh green turns to deep rich shade ;
Slowly gnarled boughs with fruit are overweighed ;
Swell the fair clusters on the swinging vine ;
The year grows old in beauty. Maiden mine,
No charms in dusty Paris will you see
One half so sweet as your simplicity.

She. My poor simplicity ! My silliness !
I pray you do not mock me, sir ; distress
Makes my voice fail ; indeed I don't know why,
But I am very silly : if I cry
You'll laugh again, and I shall cry the more.
I pray you do not mock me.

He. Not for store
Of moments dear as this, of sweet replies,
Of April dawning in those lips and eyes !
I mock you not. I smile because 'tis sweet
To see the fretted sunlight at our feet.
I smile, because your eyes are large and round ;
I smile to think I sit on grassy mound
And prattle with a girl ; while far away
The huddled crowd of Paris wear the day

Uneasy—fitting on from sport to sport ;
Stabbing with jest, and winging quick retort ;
Playing and playing, lest they see pass by
Young Pleasure's drear-eyed mate, Satiety.
Fever of life, O absinthe, cigarette,
O endless theatre where in order set
A dull-eyed people all the long night through
Sit without hope of seeing something new !
O dulness smartly uttered ! paradox !
O hired applause, bought flowers from the box !
O acres of stretched canvas, where with skill
The painter shows new forms of every ill—
Historic bloodshed, new-distorted dress,
And unimagined, undraped ugliness !
O pleasure without laughter, strange disease
Of mad amusements that can never please !
O storm and stress of gold, and fuss, and feather !
O hollow Paris, you and I together
Have run the weary round of mirth. — But
now !
Now the quick air comes wooing ; on the bough

A squirrel stops to listen ; one small bird
Is talkative, and naught beside is heard,
Save murmur of wise bees amid the bloom.
Far, far away the dim musk-scented room
Is shut from sunlight, and the ear is full
Of clatter, and the restless eye grows dull.
O pretty girl of laughter all compact,
Of little fancy, and of simple fact,
Maid o' the milking, queen of holiday,
My brier-rose from the close hedge astray,
My heart can beat again, my eyes can see ;
I sought Arcadia, and she came to me.
Here will we rest.

She. But, sir, is Paris near ?

He. Take me, take Paris ; I have Paris here,
Here in my shrivelled heart, my weary face,
Here in my tailor's artificial grace,
In scorn of joys which can no more delay me,
In arrogance which bids you thus obey me.
I am all Paris, spoiled child of the sun,
And I am at your feet, my little one.

She. Oh, sir, I dare not—sir, I cannot speak.

He. Then kiss for answer, for all words are weak.

Up, little heart! an altar quick prepare
Of well-trimmed turf entwined with flowers fair—
The flowers are tame in Paris:—here will I
Dwell with my love half-way to Arcady.
Free from fierce joys and more abiding pain,
Clear to Lord Hymen raise the simple marriage
strain.

SONG.

Now together let us sing,
Hymen, Hymen! Hours take wing,
Hours quick-winged with our delight,
Gone like smoke that's blue and bright
In the happy morning air.
Quick, then, with flowers fair!
Flowers to the altar bring—
Simple sweet our offering—
And both together sing
O Hymen, be propitious, Hymen.
O Hymen, Hymenæe.

(*He sings.*)

Where the altar turf is set,
Smoke of perfumed cigarette
Melts to air, and flame springs high
From the liquor fierce that I
Pour from out my silver flask.

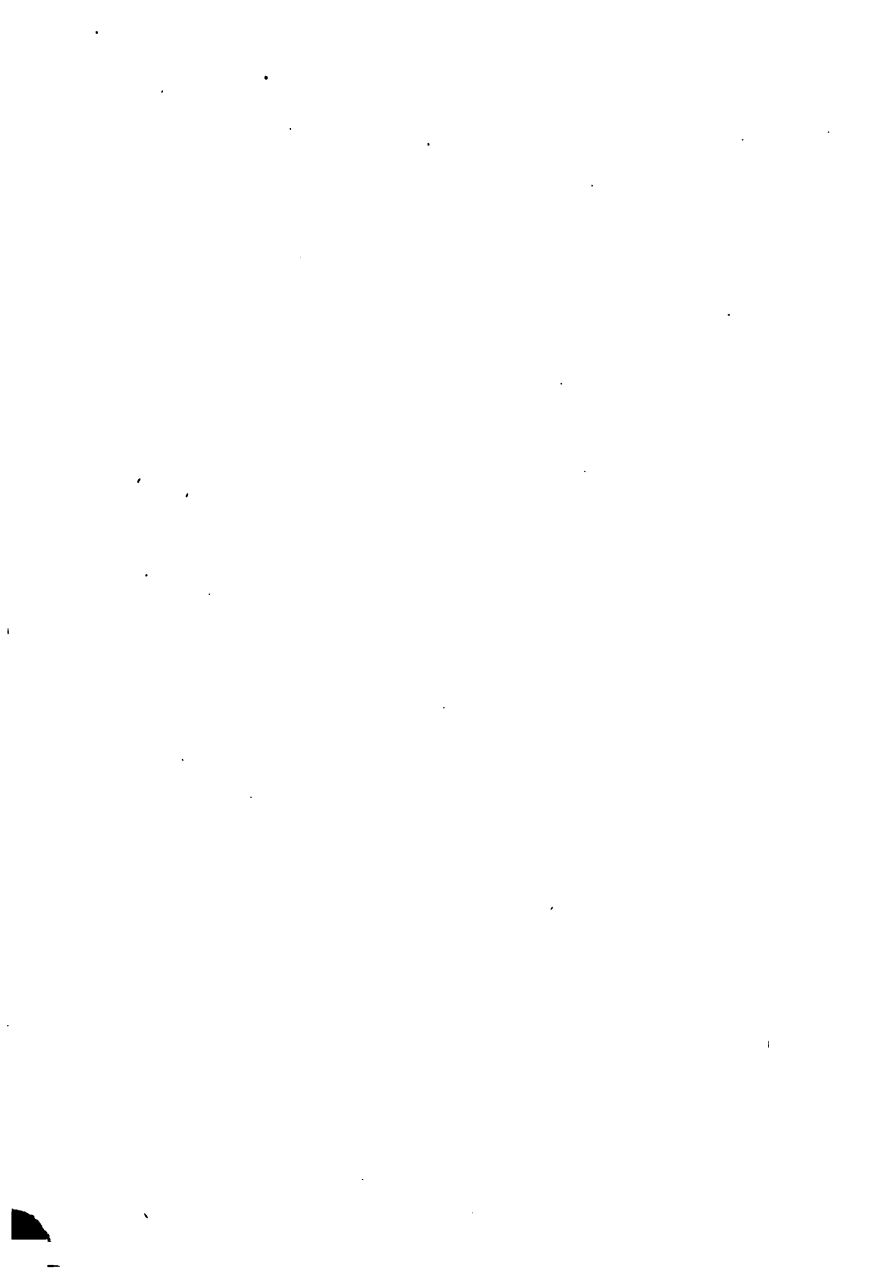
(*They both sing.*)

Thus we end our easy task,
And the happy rite is done.
Now westward slopes the sun;
All the sky, as he goes down,
Takes the glow of saffron gown,
As far from noisy town
We raise our song of Hymen, Hymen,
O Hymen, Hymenæe.

Thus sang the two together sweet and low;
And days went by in order sweet and slow;
And sweet and low birds chattered 'mid the bloom;
And sweet and slow was life to bride and groom—

Lo ! life was sweet to her and slow to him.
The whimsical had gratified his whim.
Morn brings the cows, at eve they homeward go,
But no morn brings the far-off Figaro.
And yet 'tis good to sit with lazy feet
Dropped in the stream, and think of dusty street ;
To milk the evening cow, nor care for haste,
Recalling absinthe and less lacteal taste.
O gay the chatter of Arcadian lass,
O gay the boulevard all aglare with gas,
O gay, O gay !—Once at that calm abode
Was dropped a last year's paper in the road;
And one wild day a stray Arcadian swain
Grinned through the leaves, and went away again.

A CARD FOR LADY ROEDALE



A CARD FOR LADY ROEDALE.

LADY ROEDALE *is in London at the height of the season. It is 5.30 P.M., and her tea-table is beside her. She speaks with an air of melancholy.*

AND has it come to this? That I should ask for an invitation to Mrs Pudford's ball, and should not get it! I sometimes think that there is nothing too silly for me to do. Oh dear me! And at my age too! That I, who never asked for anything, should plot—absolutely plot—for an invitation to a ball—for a ball of a Mrs Pudford—and should not get it! It seems strange that I should survive such humilia-

tion. After all, one survives everything. And yet there are people who talk about the survival of the fittest. I suppose I shall live it down: one lives down so many things. Why should I care to go to Mrs Pudford's dance? It would be exceedingly tiresome. I am indifferent. But yet I shall have to punish Pattle Appleby for putting the idea into my head. Poor dear Pattle!

(Servant announces.) Mr Pattle Appleby.

P. A. My dear lady! What good fortune to find you at home!

Lady R. My dear Pattle, don't be extravagant. You know I don't like extravagance.

P. A. I will be what you like: I will do what you like: command me.

Lady R. Don't gesticulate! You know I don't like gesticulation in hot weather.

P. A. Forgive me; but I feel so happy: I delight in this genial warmth. When there is an English summer, it is better than any summer: it is bountiful; it seems to make us expand.

Lady R. You know I don't like expansion. Won't you compress yourself, and sit down, and amuse me?

P. A. Forgive me, dear lady: I make a thousand apologies.

Lady R. One is enough. You know I don't care about apologies.

P. A. I wish I knew what you do care about. I should so much like to be able to please you in any way; to do something in return for these delightful visits, and this delicious tea. How lucky I am to find you at home!

Lady R. Which way did you come?

P. A. Which way? Let me see; let me see. I came through Half-Moon Street.

Lady R. Then you tried to find Susan Lorimer first. I ought to be angry.

P. A. No: upon my word. I give you my word: I——

Lady R. You were quite right. Susan is very agreeable. I can't be angry: I haven't the energy.

P. A. But I assure you——

Lady R. You know I don't like assurance.

P. A. I am so sorry!—Well? and what's the news?

Lady R. How absurd of you to ask me for news. I never know anything. Besides, there never is anything new in this monotonous world.

P. A. A most delightful world, I think. So gay!

Lady R. Monotonous.

P. A. Monotonous! No, no, no. Think of the variety. Think of the hundreds of pleasant houses! Think of the charming breaks at Easter and Whitsuntide; the Derby; Ascot; drives on coaches, and water-parties on the river; delightful Saturday-till-Mondays; Henley Regatta; the Harrow Match; Goodwood; Cowes; Scotland; the German waters; the most agreeable dinners in town and country.

Lady R. Year after year the same things in the same order. If people would for once go to Cowes at Easter, or have Ascot before the Derby, or—oh if somebody would only invent a substitute for iced coffee!

P. A. Ascot before the Derby! What an extraordinary idea! You might as well reverse the order of your dinner—begin with your strawberries and end with your soup.

Lady R. And why not? My dear Pattle, I am not at all sure that you have not had an inspiration. Any change is worth trying, if life is to be anything better than prison discipline.

P. A. How can you know what prison discipline is like?

Lady R. One knows everything nowadays. Everybody writes books—even the criminals. Don't you write books?

P. A. No, no; I'm not clever enough.

Lady R. It isn't the clever people who write books. You really might try it this year after Cowes—instead of German waters. I think I should like you better, if you would do something different.

P. A. Ah! That is an inducement indeed.

Lady R. What *do* you do? Do you read?

P. A. Read? Read? I read my 'Morning Post' every morning after breakfast.

Lady R. Every morning at the same hour! He might as well be the milkman.

P. A. Upon my word I don't think I've any time to read. I am so busy at this time of year. I give you my word I can scarcely find time to answer my notes.

Lady R. Oh, I know; I know: little notes! Little notes dropping in; and little grooms waiting for answers; and little women with big bandboxes; and Susan Lorimer at the door in her eternal Victoria, and "Would you kindly send a verbal answer if you can go to the French play with her to-night, or to the opera to-morrow, or dine with her on Sunday when there will be no party, or"—oh dear me!

P. A. Well you see, my dear lady, the world couldn't go on without these little notes and arrangements: they make part of the delightful bustle—the movement—the——

Lady R. The treadmill.

P. A. Delightful! You are so admirably amusing.

Lady R. My dear Pattle, you don't think I'm joking, do you? I'm sure I don't know why one goes this weary round. I suppose because it's the right thing. Oh dear me! there is nothing in the world so bad as the right thing.

P. A. Oh come; come now; it's better than the wrong thing, isn't it?

Lady R. Don't be funny. You ought to know that I don't like wit before dinner.

P. A. Ah, my dear lady, be careful! I thought you liked everything at the wrong time; that you were in love with the unexpected.

Lady R. "In love" is a vile phrase. And please don't argue. Haven't you heard often enough—often enough indeed!—that women are not consistent.

P. A. Women are charming; and that's enough for me.

Lady R. What comical old threadbare things you say! Ten years ago you were saying that sort of

thing. Ten years! Time enough for the taking of Troy! I think that the world has ceased moving.

P. A. The world has certainly stood still with you.

Lady R. Oh dear no! Ten years ago I was a pretty girl; as it was in the dark ages, I may say that I was a very pretty girl.

P. A. My dear lady, you need not tell me that. Am I likely to forget it?

Lady R. I believe you have a wonderful memory for unimportant matters.

P. A. Unimportant!

Lady R. Yes, I once was pretty.

P. A. Once!

Lady R. I was pretty; and nobody cared——

P. A. Oh no; no, no; don't say that.

Lady R. I was nice—a really nice girl; and nobody cared. Now——

P. A. Now you have the world at your feet.

Lady R. And now *I* don't care. It is such a ridiculous old world; and my feet have done with

their dancing. It annoys me to think how charming I was ten years ago; and all for nothing. I didn't even appreciate it myself.

P. A. I did. But may I not say that the charm is not lost, but rather intensified and elevated?

Lady R. Don't be contradictory! I was certainly much prettier.

P. A. You were very pretty indeed. But you didn't know how to be a beauty.

Lady R. How to be a beauty! What a tiresome idea! It's like how to grow thin; or how to grow fat; or how to dress on £15 a-year. How to be a beauty! It's as bad as a column of advertisements.

P. A. But what an art it is! What a combination of delightful qualities of hand and eye, of patience, of nerve——

Lady R. Of nerve!

P. A. To be dressed neither too much nor too little; to come into the room neither too fast nor too slow; to stand at ease before the eyes of women; to look round for the eyes of men with certainty and

without eagerness ; cool, confident ; a conqueror without effort ; perfect from the heel of the little shoe to the diamonds in the hair ; subduer of mankind, and always mistress of herself—charming ! delightful !

Lady R. Are you thinking of poor dear Susan ?

P. A. No, no, no.

Lady R. I thought not.

P. A. And why not ?

Lady R. You spoke of a *little* shoe.

P. A. Delightful ! You are too wicked and too charming.

Lady R. You give a receipt for a Beauty as if she were a pudding ; but you have left out one thing.

P. A. And what is that ?

Lady R. The beauty.

P. A. That is comparatively unimportant.

Lady R. Is it ? My dear Pattle, you interest me.

P. A. My dear lady, this tea of yours is above criticism ; but if it were of an inferior quality, made with boiling water, blended with delicious cream, and served in this exquisite china, it would delight people

of the finest taste. So is it with beauty. We have learned to appreciate beauties more than beauty. Ten years ago there was no demand for beauties.

Lady R. You speak as if they were something in the City; as if they might be supplied in second quality tea-chests. Oh dear me! What a world it is!

P. A. A funny world no doubt.

Lady R. You must have a strange idea of fun.

P. A. Well, you really must not give up this unsatisfactory world till after the ball.

Lady R. What ball?

P. A. What ball! *The* ball! The ball of the week—of the season—of the generation; the ball to which all the world are dying to go, and which so very very few of the very very nicest people will see.

Lady R. Do you mean Mrs What's-her-name's—Padford's—Pudford's?

P. A. Of course. What else could I mean?

Lady R. Do tell me, Pattle—I am really rather curious to know. What is the attraction? The woman is very vulgar, isn't she?

P. A. Yes; she is vulgar.

Lady R. And there are dreadful stories, ain't there?

P. A. Ah, you know me, my dear lady; I hear a deal of gossip; but it goes in at one ear and comes out at the other.

Lady R. O no, my dear Pattle; it goes in at both ears, and comes out of your mouth. That's why we like you. And you know perfectly well that there are stories.

P. A. There *were* stories. Yes, there were a good many stories: there was one — ha, ha! I must tell you——

Lady R. No.—I don't care. Upon my word it is a fact that I don't care in the least to hear the story about Mrs Puddiford: it is very strange; I think I must be ill.

P. A. Pudford is her name.

Lady R. And her house is not a good house for a ball, is it?

P. A. The worst in London.

Lady R. And Mr—Mr What's-his-name—I know it isn't Mudford—the husband—

P. A. Pudford.

Lady R. Mr Pudford has done all sorts of horrors in the City, pushing things up and down, and things, hasn't he?

P. A. Yes. Pudford is impossible: you needn't know Pudford.

Lady R. Thank you. And what is the attraction? Why are all these notes flying about, and everybody in a fever?

P. A. You will never guess.

Lady R. Certainly not. I don't mind your telling me.

P. A. What do you say to a new dish for supper?

Lady R. Are people going to the Pudford ball for food?

P. A. For a new dish! There is only one man in

the world who can make it. Ambassadors have intrigued for the receipt; Countesses have knelt for it; it is even said that a rival artist shot himself after his fiftieth failure to attain the incomparable flavour.

Lady R. And is it really new?

P. A. Absolutely new.

Lady R. And what is it like?

P. A. Nobody in Paris can describe it; in London nobody has tasted it.

Lady R. And of course this Pudford bought the secret. That sort of man buys everything.

P. A. There are things which money cannot buy. The cook of M. de Samary, the artist, the inventor, has sworn to bequeath the secret to his son. He is ambitious to found a family.

Lady R. That interests me. Even artists have their weaknesses.

P. A. It is really a most thrilling story. M. de Samary is largely interested in a company which Mr Pudford started, and which he still controls. Pudford wrote to de Samary for the receipt. The

Frenchman delayed his answer, and the next morning went to the Bourse. To his horror, he found that his shares had fallen so far that he dared not sell. He telegraphed to Pudford that he would get the receipt; and went to his wife. Madame de Samary belongs, as you know, to one of the oldest and proudest families of France; and yet it is generally believed in Paris that she fell on her knees in her own kitchen, and wept at the feet of her own cook.

Lady R. Affecting situation! And they mingled their tears? And he was no stronger than Merlin? He told his secret?

P. A. No, no, my dear lady. If the artist and the man were softened, the father was adamant. He appealed to his family. He stood firm for the sake of his heir.

Lady R. And then?

P. A. It was a tremendous situation. Down went the shares in the company. M. de Samary tore his hair, and polished his pistols. Madame

appeared in black, and went to the Madeleine. Then a great idea came to the inventor. He took a heroic resolve. He determined to come to London.

Lady R. Heroic indeed!

P. A. He suffers agonies at sea. To-night he is to cross the Channel: to-morrow he will be at work; and in the evening we shall taste something, which has never been tasted in England since the Conquest.

Lady R. And the next day it will be in everybody's mouth. That's so tiresome.

P. A. No, no, no, my dear lady. The next day the artist returns to Paris with his secret; and Pudford buys all the shares of M. de Samary at par. Isn't the little history delightfully complete?

Lady R. Oh yes. I am quite sorry I shan't be there.

P. A. Shan't be where?

Lady R. At the ball.

P. A. You are not going to the ball?

Lady R. I am not asked.

P. A. What?

Lady R. I am not asked.

P. A. Impossible! The duchess promised me——

Lady R. Ah, Pattle, you have always believed too much in duchesses!

P. A. What is one to believe in?

Lady R. Ah!

P. A. There must be some mistake. I will fly to her at once.

Lady R. No. That you must not do. You have done more than enough. If you say a word more on the subject to anybody, you shall never speak to me again.

P. A. Dear lady! Will you ever forgive me? It's heart-breaking. Ah, what a world it is!

Lady R. Oh! *you* think it's a bad world, do you?

P. A. Indeed, I think it is.

Lady R. Now I think it rather amusing—rather.

P. A. So false!

Lady R. Even duchesses are false.

P. A. I never should have believed it of her—never!

Lady R. My dear Pattle, you expect too much of the world. Of course it has no time to think or to remember. It's always living in the day after to-morrow. It's a fidgety world; but it's not bad fun.

P. A. I never was so hurt—never!

Lady R. You are too easily hurt. So many of you men have nerves nowadays. You are like women; and that's so tedious.

P. A. I dare say we are poor creatures.

Lady R. I have often thought it must be cigarettes and aërated waters. Your fathers drank port; and they were never hurt, unless they fell on their heads in the hunting-field.

P. A. Very likely. I dare say we are poor creatures. I have reason to know that *you* have never thought well of me.

Lady R. My dear Pattle, please don't be so terribly down-hearted. We shall be mingling our tears like Madame de Samary and her cook. I like you for your good spirits—as I like champagne, or——

P. A. You never liked me.

Lady R. Oh don't!

P. A. Have I not reason to know that you never liked me? You have given me reason often enough.

Lady R. Don't. Please don't. You haven't told me anything yet to make me laugh.

P. A. How can I?

Lady R. Has nobody said a good thing?

P. A. Nobody. And if anybody had, I should spoil it in telling. I am fit for nothing but to tell you of the last good thing to eat. I am fit for nothing better; and whose fault is it that I am fit for nothing better?

Lady R. My dear Pattle, you are fit for everything—awfully fit, as the boys say.

P. A. When I first saw you, I was a boy.

Lady R. Everybody has been a boy once—or a girl. Perhaps you were unlucky in being a boy.

P. A. I was a boy; and you nearly broke my heart by refusing me.

Lady R. Ah! we can laugh at all that now.

P. A. I can't laugh. I feel much more inclined to tears.

Lady R. My dear Pattle, I am certain that you indulge too much in cigarettes and lowering waters.

P. A. Lowering waters! And I spoke of tears. Have I ever wavered in my allegiance?

Lady R. It has been your only fault. You acquired a habit. You know I hate habits.

P. A. How many times have I asked you to——

Lady R. Upon my word I don't know.

P. A. Ah, how I have suffered!

Lady R. Oh no. I really do think—I do hope that you have liked it a little. People do—don't you think so?—like that sort of suffering; and I always hoped that you, and—oh dear me, I really am so sorry!

P. A. I have no wish to blame you.

Lady R. And why should you?

P. A. I have asked you again and again.

Lady R. Yes, it's been your nearest approach to

a regular occupation. Oh, I beg your pardon. I really am so sorry.

P. A. And now you laugh at me.

Lady R. No: I think not; and really you ought to be so grateful to me. Really you must know that I should have made you miserable.

P. A. And what have you made me?

Lady R. Dear Pattle! I never made anything in my life.

P. A. And I should have made such an excellent husband.

Lady R. Would you? I dare say: I really think you would.

P. A. I should never have given you a moment's uneasiness.

Lady R. You never would; that's true; oh dear, how monotonous! A man who never gave one a moment's uneasiness! How have we drifted into this old channel? Change the subject, please.

P. A. I don't want to. Oh Clara——

Lady R. Clara! My dear Pattle, please don't.

P. A. But I can't help it. You know I can't help it.

Lady R. It always comes when you are depressed about something. Please go away, and come back when you are in good spirits again.

P. A. No, Clara. I feel that I must speak.

Lady R. You have felt it so often.

P. A. Can you give me no hope?

Lady R. Of course not. How can you be so foolish?

P. A. I always told you I would never take No for an answer.

Lady R. Ah, dear Pattle, you might have taken—what is it?—twelve—thirteen—yes, thirteen noes for an answer.

P. A. Fourteen!

Lady R. Fourteen! Oh, you count that absurd time at—no, I think I don't count that.

P. A. I don't think any woman ever had so constant a suitor.

Lady R. Yes; that's what's so tiresome. Why don't you go away? I really think you need a change.

P. A. I have been away so often. I went away when you married.

Lady R. Ah, don't talk of that.

P. A. And it didn't do any good. And I didn't come back till you were free. And then you sent me away again; and I didn't come back till you had refused Claud Huntley in Rome.

Lady R. Did I refuse him? No; I don't think I refused him; poor dear Claud! Shan't I give you another cup of tea?

P. A. I don't want tea: it isn't that——

Lady R. I shall be always so glad to give you a cup of tea.

P. A. I am to go then?

Lady R. Good-bye, and do come and tell me all about the Puddiford ball.

P. A. I never was so hurt about anything: the name is Pudford.

Lady R. Pudford; please don't be hurt; good-bye.

P. A. I shall never give up hope, as long as you are free.

Lady R. Ah, I am so tired of that. Constancy is so out of date. Come back the day after to-morrow, and tell me about the ball. And please notice very carefully what Susan Lorimer wears. She looks too shocking in pink. Good-bye.

P. A. Good-bye.

(So Mr Pattle Appleby goes away ; and she, left alone, stretches her arms ; then sighs ; then laughs ; and at last speaks.)

Lady R. Extraordinary little man ! He never will learn that he is not the sort of man one marries. I wonder why one doesn't marry that sort of man. Oh dear me, I wish I hadn't such a habit of wondering. He is so good, and so sensible, and so devoted—oh, so devoted. I can't tell him once for all that he is not the sort of man one marries. He would ask why ; and I'm sure I don't know why. Besides, I never do say anything once for all. Poor dear Pattle ! It was fourteen ; and now it is fifteen. Fifteen times ! No, I don't think I ought to count that

ridiculous third time : I shall say fourteen. What's that ? Somebody's running up-stairs : he's coming back, what for ? his hat ? No. He's going to do it again : it will be fifteen after all : well, it's a good round number. Fifteen.

P. A. (*Dancing into the room*). Victoria ! Victoria !

Lady R. Oh no ; not at all ; really not.

P. A. Victoria ! *Ecco !* Mrs Pudford—At Home—Dancing—With the Duchess of Ruffborough's compts. There !

Lady R. Oh dear me ! how funny !

P. A. Funny ! It's glorious. What shall you wear ?

Lady R. Anything ; nothing ; I shan't go.

P. A. Not go ! It would be flying in the face of——

Lady R. No, I think not.—Oh Pattle, how funny you are !

P. A. You won't go !

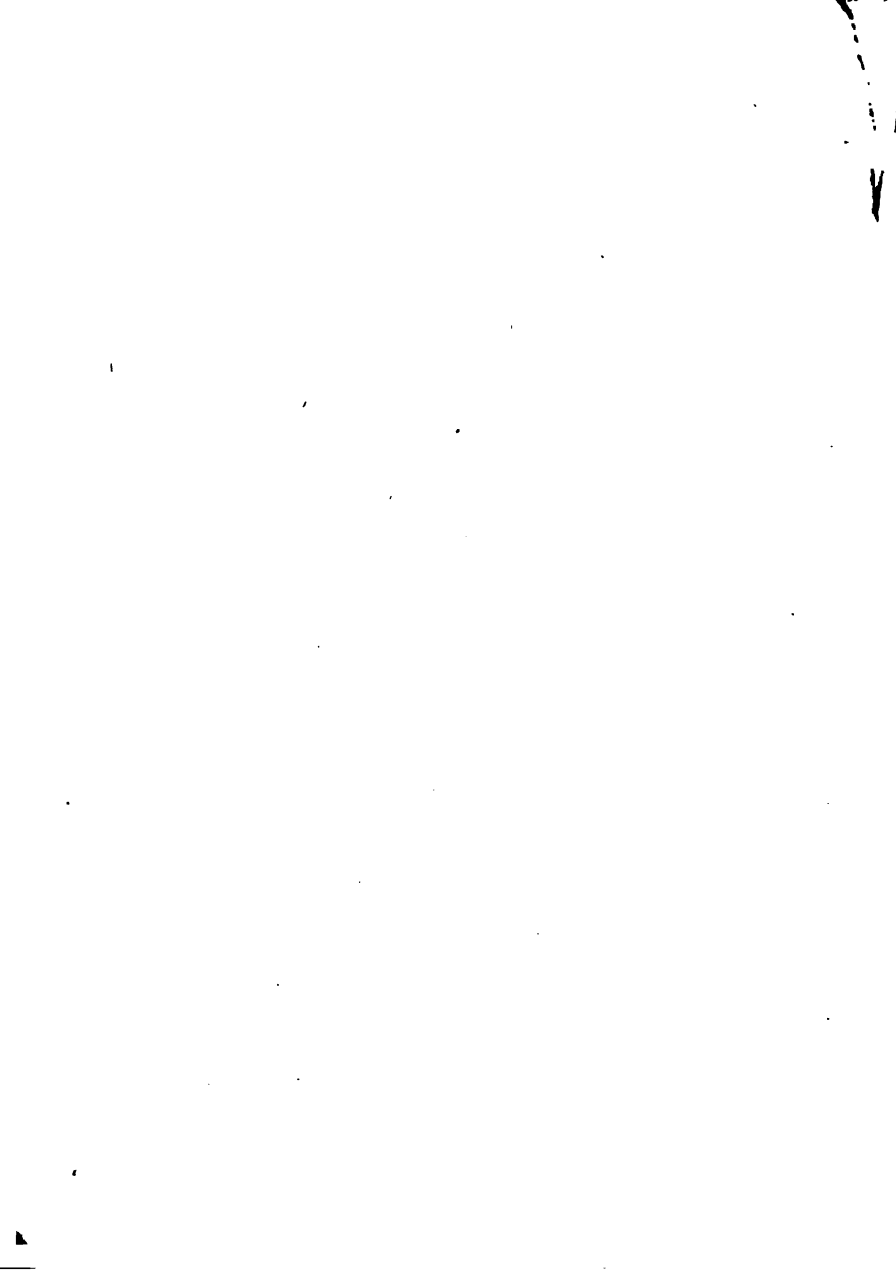
Lady R. What shall I wear ?

P. A. Oh ; of course ; wear that lovely thing

which you wore at Lady Rickworth's: white and gold is so becoming to you: is it by Worth or——
Worth of course; *au revoir!* I must fly; I have a thousand things to do before dinner; I never was so pleased in my life: adieu till the ball! *au revoir!* (*He hurries out.*)

Lady R. Extraordinary little man! It isn't fifteen after all. Yes; I shall count that third time. Fifteen is such a good number. Fifteen! Oh dear me! How funny!

MABEL'S HOLY DAY



MABEL'S HOLY DAY.

In a Garden.

Arthur. He came, saw, and was conquered. Lady
mine,

You cannot choose but conquer ; in mere sport
You triumph, and your prize a human heart ;
Where others strive, you take your ease and win,—
Win for you must ; and so our friend was won,—
Tamed to the rose-chain which I've worn so long.
Was never victory more swift and sure !

Mabel. Never.

A. A week, day, hour—nay, not so much ;
He came, he saw, was conquered. Victory !
Glory to you and me !

M. Take all the glory.

A. No—though 'twas I that dragged him from his
books,

'Twas you that tamed him. Bent o'er dusty books
There was my friend, my Ralph, my dear sworn
brother,

After some hundred years or so turned—poet,
Spoiling his eyes—the boy has pleasant eyes—
Gnawing a weighty tome, grub, scholar, mole,
Philosopher of dusk and dust—and poet.
I found him, and I dragged him forth to light.

M. To gaslight.

A. Yes, to gaslight—best of lights.
There he sat blinking—'twas the rarest sport—
The innocent had never seen a play,
Never! He knew his Shakspeare, loved the book,
But not the boards; they said the modern stage
Was all unworthy; so he only came
Because I prayed him, and we had been friends.

M. You had been friends!

A. Friends? Yes, the closest friends.

Oh but to see the change ! There he sat dazed,
Puzzled, disdainful ; and the play began.
What's this ? The dazed eyes open round and bright.
What's this ? Black-letter ? parchment ? manuscript ?
A student's prize ? Newest old-fashioned verse,
Or old verse new the fashion ? Yes, by Love,
By the great little master ! Such a scroll
As not all libraries on earth can match,
Parchment of living words, live manuscript,
Most old, most new, the very fount of song,
The world writ small in poetry—a woman.
He did not know the kind.

M. And does he know it ?

A. He learns his lesson daily at your feet.

M. What shall you do ? Where do you go to-day ?

A. I am to go ? I weary you ?

M. Not much.

A. I cannot comprehend you.

M. I hope not.

A. I can but leave you.

Ralph. Oh what a day ! Are you at las content ?
My lady, did you ever see such a day ?

M. I have seen many days.

R. But none like this.

Why, all the land to-day is fairyland.
I came by the upland common all ablaze
With gorse from end to end, and met the breeze
Full in the face, and the grey morning clouds
Rolled northward rent, and the great sun shone
through.

But that was nothing : where the road dips down
Steep from rough common to the wide grass-lands,
I found a world of blossom ; by my side
The May-trees stood so thick with bloom, methought
No space was there for song o' the thrush, that shook
The heart o' the bush with rhapsodies of love.
But that was nothing ; for each blade of grass
Had its rain-jewel ; short-lived buttercups—
Wealth of the meadow, fairy merchants' gold—
Thronged to my feet ; then field and hedgerow, elms
All newly green, and golden youth of oaks,

And great horse-chestnut with imperial plumes ;
Far trees, and farther in the farther fields,
Till I saw dimly the fair silver coils,
Where the full Thames lay dreaming. All the land
Was one broad flood of blossom, all the air
Was scent of blossom. Down the road I came,
Like a winged creature who but walks for whim,
Half stifled by the songs I could not sing :
But that was less than nothing ; for I came
Under your garden-wall, the old red wall,
Rough stained and beautiful ; and there I stood
Delaying my delight, and looking up
I looked close in and through laburnum bloom,
And through the bloom light slanted to my eyes,
Sunshine and blossom dazzling, golden shower,
Quivering, with beauty breathless : but that's
nothing,
For when I pushed your gate, my dusty feet
Were ankle-deep in daisies ; nothing still,
For round the o'erflowing lilac-bush I stole
Breathless, and here are you.

M. Yes, here am I;—
And is that something?

R. Crown o' the day to me,
Music that makes all music's meaning clear,
The master-touch interpreting all lights,
Colour of colours, heart o' the living rose——

M. Enough! enough! Would you too flatter?

R. No.
I pray you pardon me. I am mad to-day,
Drunken with spring: this morning on the road
I could not sing, for all the world was poem;
The world was poet, I was dumb; but now
Beholding you I speak I know not what,
The pent stream flows, and I am rhapsodist.
I pray you pardon me.

M. You need no pardon:
I think your liking for these things is real.
You really like the country.

R. Really like it,
To-day I love it.

M. Arthur loves the town.

R. Arthur? Where is he? Will he come to-day?

M. Yes, he is here; he's somewhere in the house—
Helping my maid perhaps to plan a gown
For the next part I play.—

R. Don't talk of plays.
Is not this better than the playhouse?

M. Yes:
Oh so much better! This is holiday,
My holiday amid the birds and bloom,
My holiday with flowers.

R. You love flowers.

M. I hate them.

R. What!

M. I hate them. So would you
If they were hurled at you, each on its wire,
Falling with a thud on the boards, stirring the
dust,
Formal and scentless, dull, inevitable
As gloves or fans—a bouquet!

R. Bloom is bloom.
May I not choose some flowers for my lady?

M. No, let them live ; I am so modest, I,
One daisy shall suffice me ; thanks, my poet.

R. Your poet ! If I dared—that was my dream
The night when I first saw you. On that night
I was so full of poetry, or verse
Which would be poetry, so full of song,
That, as I walked home through the London
crowd—

Crowd that was but a murmur in my ears,
A shadow world,—I heard no single word
Of Arthur's talk, who will be critical.
The moon shone fair above base yellow lights,
And my lips babbled song ; the moon shone fair
And touched my lips with madness, till I thought
That I was poet, fit to be your poet.
I broke from Arthur, and ran home ; my brain
Was burning ; " It is the god," I cried,
" The god inspires me : " so I seized my pen
And wrote :—and by the morning light I read
Page after page of broken scribbled verse,
Poor verse—Yes, you may laugh.

M.

I do not laugh.

Show me this verse.

R.

Then you love poetry ?

M. I hate it. Verses have been flung at me
To fall with a thud like flowers : poetry
Is but cheap flowers, jewellery that's cheap,
Cheap as my life.

R.

Why will you talk like that ?

M. I talk as I feel. I am not good, you know ;
Not good,—and somewhat weary of my life ;
At least I can be honest—bad but true,—
Show me your verse.

R.

My lady, speak no more

These cruel words against yourself. You know
I can't believe them—even if I would.

M. You would believe them then ?*R.*

I wished to once ;

Once ; long ago.

M.

We have been friends one week.

R. I was a fool, a prejudiced poor fool,
And I knew nothing.

M. A week ago ! Poor boy !

R. I am a boy no longer. As a boy
I lived with boys, and loved my friends, my dreams,
And did not hate my books ; I worked and played,
Glad both of work and play. Then I saw you :
Now I see nought but you.

M. Nought but each cloud,
Each summer cloud, each tree, each blade of grass.

R. I saw all these because I came to you,
Because I came to you, all beautiful ;
They had but mocked me else.

M. As they mock me.
Would I could see their beauty ; for this land,
Your dainty land of spring, is laid in flats ;
The carpenters are barely out of sight ;
Smell o' the lamp, glare o' the gas ; and soon
Not without jolt and creak the play's next scene
Will be presented. I foresee the scene.

R. What is that scene ?

M. A dainty scene enough ;
A room, a bijou, boudoir, lady's bower ;

A wall of satin, save where Cupids leer
From panels ; two long windows draped in lace
Through which the rose-coloured pale sunlight faints
To die on flowered carpet ; all things there
Which women love, for which — Let's hear your
verse.

R. There are tears in your eyes.

M. No, no. My eyes are dazed
By too much lime-light. Let me hear your verse.

R. There are tears in your eyes : why do you cry ?
Poor child !

M. Child ! I am laughing now ; are you content ?
Child ? I suppose that I was once a child,
Knowing no harm i' the world, a little child.
I must have been—but it was long ago.

R. Tell me about yourself.

M. With pleasure, sir ;
The subject interests me : I was born
Some five-and-twenty years ago, or more—
I think that I was born before the flood :
I lived in a farm.—Now mark the pretty scene !

To Right a cottage porch o'ergrown with roses ;
Right Centre—pump or pigeon-house on pole ;
Then practicable gate o' the old pasture ;
And Left a bit of barn-door. On this scene
Enter a young girl singing ; that was I.
“Dost like the picture ?” as they ask i' the play.
But come, recite ! You did not tear them all,
Not all your pretty verses ?

R.

All, I think :

There's something I remember—but I will not,
You are so strange to-day.

M.

You like me not :

You like me not to-day ; and that is well ;
You must not like me.

R.

Stop ; don't tell me that ;

It is too late.

M.

Poor boy !

R.

Not poor but rich,

Rich with a kingdom that I would not yield
To be an Emperor.

M.

And that's not much.

Don't talk like a young lover on the stage !
This is my garden, this my holiday ;
Keep the stage lover from me :—Be my Siebel,
Cull me fair flowers.

R. Let the flowers live ;

Is not the whole world nosegay for my lady ?

M. Pestilent vapours.

R. No.

M. Disperse them then ;

Come, let me have my hour ; come, if you love me ;

Sit by my feet and speak your verse to me ;

Here at my feet ! That's right ; and now the
verses !

R. They are so weak.

M. The better ! Who am I

That I should make men poets ? Quires of verse

Have been discharged at me ; they were all weak.

Begin !

R. I cannot.

M. If you love me, Ralph.

R. I must. I can remember but few lines.

Night's flower, child of night and perfumed air—
Star o' the night, lone star as pure as pale—
Night's bird whose mere discourse is music rare—
Bird, star, and flower, lovelorn nightingale—
Lightning of wrath, O passion fierce and frail—
Heart o' the rose, O heart of love's own heart—
Air, fire, life, death—and woman too thou art.

I have obeyed you, lady.

M. Thanks, my poet.

And when I played, you saw all this in me?

R. You were so much to me.

M. And it was real?

Was this play real to you? Did you believe?

R. The woman that you played was real to me;
Now shadow of a shade, since you are real,
Since I am by your feet, and this is you.

M. Shadow of a shade, ay, shadow of shade is play
And woman too.

R. Then nought be real to me
But this dear shade.

M. No ; have no faith in me.

R. I have no choice.

M. Poor boy !

R. Nay, not so poor !

Now, when I felt your hand light on my hair,

A blessing fell on me : Oh to sit here

For ever, that this moment might be time,

Dream with no waking after ! dreamful sleep,

Or death of all thought save that you are near.

M. Yes, dream ; you are safe in dreams — but
never wake.

R. Dream, and I dream this day will ne'er be done.

M. The butterfly outlives it, but not love.

R. One night falls dark, dark night on love and
life.

M. Oh this is poetry, folly, player's rant ;
You dream and wake to-morrow. A week ago
We two were strangers ; let some few days pass
And we are strangers.

R. But a week ago
I had not lived.

M. Stage fever is not life ;
Stage fever's quick.

R. Yes, quick to cure or kill.

M. You must not talk like that.

R. What need to talk ?
Let the air talk in the lilac ; you and I
Sit silent breathing spring-time—you and I.

M. And are you happy ?

R. I am rich with joy,
And yet not wholly happy.

M. Lover's mood !
O lover's luxury of sighs long-drawn !
Immortal—dead at sundown ! Is't not sweet
To taste the day's delight, and sorrow too,
Sorrow in the thought that you and I must part ?

R. Why must we part ?

M. Why ! Wake and see the world.
The world on which I make my player's round,
A star—how runs it ?—star that's pale and pure,
Star o' the troupe, a comet with faint tail,
With somewhat musty followers—not with you.

Child, would you journey round this dusty world
Tied to my apron-string?

R. Yes, that would I.

M. No, be a man and burst these idle bonds,
These apron-strings.

R. Who tied me here but you?
You bound me, and I will not loose the bonds.
You bid me be a man; be woman you
To pity me: "I would I were thy bird."

M. Don't quote from plays.

R. 'Tis real enough to me.

M. I've seen so many love-sick Montagues;
I've stepped from windows with no house behind,
Leaned from sham balconies to lisp sham love;—
The powder's thick on the child Juliet's cheek;
She's dead i' the first scene, dead, stark, analysed,
Dissected—Now I shock you! You see now
How dull to feel I am, how cold, how bad,
How tired of life! A live warm-blooded man
Had better crush his heart against a stone
Than look for love in me. Be warned in time.

All is cold here at my heart, all is cold here.
See me, not Juliet in me : push her back,
This Juliet of your fancy, to the tomb ;
To the tomb with her, if you love me, Ralph.

R. If I love !

M. Child, poor child, you must not love,
You shall not love me.

R. I am not a child,—
I love you, Mabel.

M. Hush ! you shall not love me.
You will not : do you mark me ? Arthur ! here !
Where is my loving playmate ? Ho, boy, ho !
Come to me, Arthur.

Arthur (coming to them). I salute you both.
Good morning, Ralph, a happy day to you !
Is it not happy, man ?

M. Oh, much too happy !
I triumph, Arthur !

A. May I kiss your hand ?

M. My lips if you will ; I am right royal
to-day.

A. (*to her*). What are you saying? You will
spoil it all.

M. Look how the boy stares, boy who dares not
think

Of woman's lip, who dares not lift his eye
When trembling sore he takes her finger-tips,—
Boy! child! a woman's wine is made of grapes,
Virtue! a fig's end!—oh, how runs the stuff?—
Iago knew us.

A. Good! Brava! brava!

Was ever such an actress! Ralph, applaud!
I'll swear he half believes her. What an actress!

R. (*to her*). And is this acting?

M. No. I tell you, no.

(Be silent, Arthur, do not cross my whim.)

I have been acting, acting for a week,
A long dull week, seven days of sentiment—
Heaven bless us all!—of sentiment and song;
Sighing like furnace, of young grass and lambs,
Young grass, young lambs, young love, love of a boy.
But now good-bye ingenuous charm of youth,

Good-bye to love, Good-bye to love and lamb,
And back to town! I am free, I am true, myself;
I am myself again. Good-bye, dear boy;
We meet in town? No. Then good-bye again.

R. Good-bye.

(Ralph goes away. Mabel will not look at him. When he is out of sight, and Mabel still stands and looks the other way, Arthur comes to her doubtfully.)

A. What means this, Mabel? Won't you speak?

M. Go.

A. What have I done? I've done nothing
wrong.

M. Nothing but torture me! Go!

A. Very well!

I never yet have crossed a lady's whim.

(Arthur goes away.)

M. I am alone. This is my holiday.



H E A T H E R



H E A T H E R.

Julius. Hi, good dog! Here! Come out of the sun, you four-legged idiot! Many years in my company, and still so little wisdom. Eh? What? "Dogs and Englishmen walk in the sun." Very true: but I am an Englishman who likes shade; you are my dog, and should like what I like. Sit here under my left arm. That is better. You are much to be pitied in that you cannot lean your back against the smooth trunk of a pine, and stretch out your legs before you. I too can lie on my stomach, if it please me, but you cannot for all your aspirations lean your back against a tree in comfort. Nor, though you cock your ear like a critic, do you

care a jot for that faint sighing overhead, which even on this stillest of summer days is sweet to hear. Nor do those bright intelligent eyes perceive the beauty of heather. See how my right arm, half sunken, lies along this tuft, which is springy as the very finest smoking-room sofa, and beautiful—yes, by the immortality of humbug! more beautiful than the last creation of the last æsthetic upholsterer! But heather is healthy, irrepressible, and vulgar; it rebounds; it asserts itself; it is vulgar, vivid, and healthy as those reapers out beyond the wood, where the sun smites the wide field golden. Heather is vulgar, and probably its colour is *voyant* to the well-ordered eye. In truth, this England has become a strange place, Aurelian, while you and I have been knocking about the world. Here lie you in the shade of the old pine-wood, and wag your tail—a smiling mongrel and incurable Philistine. Here lie I happy in the heather, and wag my jaw—a Philistine—but perchance to be cured and become oblivious of Ascalon.

And the strange thing is that you and I were wont to value ourselves on our taste. In this very spot have we reposed side by side, as now, and been well pleased with ourselves. Were I as once I was, I should hug myself with joy of that broad corn-land, all Danae to the sun, of the blue through the dark fir-tops: I should turn an idle eye to the hard whiteness of the road away on the right, where you delayed in the glare and ran the risk of madness, and then bless myself that I could feel the entire charm of a bed of heather spread in the shade for me. But now I am beset by doubts. What if heather be vulgar? It pushes, it rebounds, it asserts itself; it is decked with purple bells. It is not a sun-flower; it does not even wish to be a sun-flower; it is not wasted by one passionate sweet desire to become a sun-flower; it seems to be content with itself—content as a thriving grocer. Has Elfrida become a sun-flower? She used to be great fun. She was once a little girl, but now a young lady. She

would not agree with the heather. Under the dark pine-trees her gown of olive hue would be but a bit of the shadow, and she unseen but for the sunshine of her hair. O sunny hair! O wheat, out in the happy field, where the reaper is singing, or ought to be! Oh—but rhapsody is out of date. Elfrida has changed, O my dog, since the days when she was Elf, and rode the old horse bare-back, and played cricket with the boys, princess and witch of the schoolroom, elf of this wood, and queen of fairies! She is a beauty now, and her gowns are as the dead leaves of the forest for number and colour, and her head is a little bowed on one side as the head of the lily, and her face is a comely mystery. These are brave words, Aurelian. I improve apace. Yet there is none like her. What does she think of me? Were I a lover, thus idle in the sweet shade, I would solve the question by some pretty test, as thus: She loves me—she loves me not; she loves—no; she—but I perceive that you do not like me to pluck

hairs from your tail; and yet I have called you friend these many years. Let the question remain unanswered. Or let us be wise, and know she loves us not.

“Sing, little bird in the tree,
But not because my love loves me,
For she does no such thing;
Therefore, for your good pleasure only sing.”

Thank you. And now for luncheon. Now is the hour, when in eating-houses all the world over, there is clink of knives and small change, clatter of plates, and hum of talking and eating. Here there is no bustling waiter nor scent of roast joint, but only a crust of bread, an apple, and pure air. Were this my last crust you should share it. It is well, however, that you have no taste for apples. *He* would have tempted you with tea and a chop. Steady! Don't bolt your bread, and I will find a biscuit in my pocket. Be dignified, as becomes a traveller, and one who has had losses. Have I had my losses? Have I lost something rare? I

cannot say. But if I had not so longed to see the world, I might have gained something, when an Elf was tenant of this old wood. What? Enough? Why these extravagant demonstrations, this wagging of the tail, and indeed of the entire body? What do you see? Who is it? Elfrida! I did not think you would come out to-day.

Elfrida. Is it not beautiful?

Jul. Yes.—

“The valleys stand so thick with corn that they do laugh and sing.”

Elf.—

“Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean—
Tears from the depth of some divine despair,
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields.”

Jul. It is scarce autumn yet. Let it be summer still; and let us laugh with the valleys. Consider that broad beauty in the sun.

Elf. Is it not exquisite, pathetic?

Jul. Is it? You like it?

Elf. Oh yes.

Jul. It's not too bright, too garish?

Elf. Perhaps it is. I did not think that you would feel that.

Jul. Oh, not too bright for me. I like to sit in shadow and stare into the sun. But for you? I thought that you would resent the shining of the blue, the gleaming of the yellow corn, the cheerfulness of all things.

Elf. Are you laughing at me? I never know.

Jul. I laugh because you are here. It brings back other days. Oh, don't sigh. They were jolly, but none so jolly as this. Jolly! Let me say jocund.

Elf. I think it is all too bright. It hurts the eyes a little.

Jul. Are they weak, those eyes?

Elf. I think not.

Jul. I think not.

Elf. But I like soft colours best; don't you?

Jul. Tender grey skies, tender green grass, and tone.

Elf. Oh yes. That is good. That is like Lacave. It is only by studying the French painters that one can learn to love our grey-green English landscapes, to comprehend their infinite tenderness.

Jul. It is hard even for a French painter to comprehend the infinite.

Elf. Is it so hard? I wish you could see his pictures. I know so little, and I can't explain myself; but he is so clever, and it is all so true. I should like you to know him, Julius.

Jul. Let it be so. I don't hate a Frenchman. What does he paint?

Elf. Oh, wonderful still things, all rest, and brooding calm; a level grey-green sea; long, level, level sands all grey with wan sea-water; and far-off creeping mist and low grey sky.

Jul. Always that?

Elf. Yes, I think so; but with infinite variety in the monotone.

Jul. He must have a merry heart to keep him warm, or an endless cold in the head. Is he jocund, this painter?

Elf. Oh, Julius! He is always very still.

Jul. And grey? But I will learn to like the right things. Am I too old to learn? Will you teach me?

Elf. I can't teach anything, as you know, Julius. You must ask M. Lacave.

Jul.—

“The owl in the sunlight sat and said,
‘I hate your vulgar blue and red;
Oh, better the grey of a wan twilight,
Or a black nocturne at the dead of night.

O M. Hibou,

A word with you—

Pray, how can one gain so keen a sight?”

But in sober prose, sweet coz, I will to school again, and learn to love grey weather—a taste much to be desired in this old land of ours. Only let this day be holiday. Let us be happy to-day—happy as sunburnt reapers in the field. I give the day

to vulgar joy, for I am at home again, and the hour is fair. Joy is vulgar, is it not?

Elf. Oh no. Joy is good.

Jul. Good, and sweet, and sad, and so evil.

Elf. You are mocking me again, I think. But surely it is true that joy and sorrow are very near together, are one in some sort; are for us so blended and intermingled that we can no more sever one from another than the tuberose from its scent.

Jul. I knew it. Evil is sad, and sad is sweet, and sweet is good. But no more gladness, which is scarce better than jollity. We must be sweetly, sadly, seriously joyous. It shall be so to-morrow. To-morrow I will begin to learn. To-morrow to school; to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow. But to-day! To-day I am so deeply, unutterably glad of the goodly earth, where angels might gather in the corn. Think of me as one who will do better, as one who has kept bad company for years: do you wag your tail at me, sir? I said bad company, Aurelian; nay, pat him not, Elfrida,

for he is a Philistine, and must be chastened. He is happy with a bone, sorry with a beating. To-morrow will I give him a bone and a beating at the same time; thus complicate his emotions; thus begin his education. He, too, shall learn how subtly pleasure and pain are interwoven. Down, you fantastic pup!—Elfrida, this grove intoxicates me. It is not long since an Elf ran wild here, leaping in the heather, laughing to the air, darting through the shadows like a truant sunbeam fresh from heaven.

Elf. Do you remember those old days?

Jul. That is better. There is the old colour in your cheeks. Do you ever run now?

Elf. Sometimes, but not now. M. Lacave is painting me, and he likes me to be pale.

Jul. Would he were pale, very pale! You are too rare to fade, too——

Elf. Julius, what is the matter with the dog?

Jul. He has found a mare's nest. I know that air of preternatural sagacity. Lead on, Aurelian; we

follow thee. Hush! Look here! Scarce ten yards from where we sat! Is not this a day of enchantment?

Elf. Hush! Poor child, how sound he sleeps.

Jul. A little tramp of Italy, and a jolly little fellow.

Elf. He has crept in here from off the hard road of life. Don't wake him, Julius.

Jul. Not I. Do you think I would mar such slumber? Look how evenly the breath stirs the torn shirt on his breast; and how easily he lies, his knees a little bent, as if he would curl himself like some soft-coated animal warm in the heather. Did an eagle let him fall?

Elf. How beautiful is the soft olive face lying on the outstretched arm! and look at the lashes—how long they are on the cheek! Poor child! The path before him must be rough for those little feet. Poor child, poor child!

Jul. Not so poor neither. Is sleep like that worth nothing? See how he smiles, and the humorous

wrinkle between the eyebrows, and the warm blood in the cheek. It is a child's cheek, round and soft; but the jaw is firm enough. Such a one moves well and cheerily among the chances of life. No fear for him. He was born in a happy hour.

Elf. How beautiful he is, astray from a poet's Italy, fragrant of the wine-press, and eloquent of most delicate music!

Jul. Yet should he wake, that rustic bagpipe would be doubtless discordant. Sleep, little one, in good sweet Northern heather; sleep, little Ampelus, out of the swinging vines. Sleep, vagrant poem—not Ampelus; for now I bethink me, Elfrida, this is the very god of love.

Elf. Poor little child of the South.

Jul. Bad grandchild of the Southern sea—lovely and capricious grandam, with malice in her smiles. Wake him not or tremble. Elves of the wood a-many have confessed his power. See how the dog trembles. Away!

Elf. Can we do nothing for him, Julius?

Jul. Nothing. But stay. There is a book of antique lore that says to those who chance to find Eros asleep, that, be they many or few, one or two, each must sing the god a song, and cross his palm with silver. I therefore in this upturned little brown hand place this half-crown. Do you take this, its fellow, and do likewise.

Elf. I shall never pay you, Julius.

Jul. I am paid with hope. So half the charm is done. Now, sit you here upon this tiny knoll. I will lie here on the other side. So our theme is between us. Do you begin the song.

Elf. (*sings*)—

Love lies asleep

Deep in the pleasant heather ;

Wake him not lest ye weep

Through the long winter weather ;

And sorrow bud again in spring,

With apple-blossoming,

And bloom in the garden close,

With blooming of the rose,

And ye, ere ye be old,
Die with the brief pale gold,
And when the leaves are shed,
Ye too lie dead.

Jul. No fear of waking this vagrant Love. How
fast he sleeps !

Elf. What utter weariness !

Jul. What splendid health !

Jul. (*sings*)—

Oh, merry the day in the whispering wood,
Where the boy Love lies sleeping ;
And clad in artistic ladyhood
An Elf her watch is keeping !
Oh, she was a queen of the elfin race,
And flower of fairy land ;
The squirrel stood to look in her face,
And the wild dove came to her hand ;
But her fairies have given a gift more fair
Than any that elves or ladies wear,

Unbought at any mart—

A woman's heart.

Boys and maidens passing by,

Be ye wise, and let Love lie!

There's never a word than this more wise

In all the old philosophies.

Hush your song this summer day,

Lest he wake and bid you stay;

Hush and haste away,

Haste away,

Away!

Elf. And we too must be going, for look how
long the shadows of the reapers lie along the land.
How sad so sweet a day must end!

Jul. And are not others coming better than this?

Elf. Who can say? Ah, yes! I will believe that
they are coming.

Jul. That is wise, Elfrida. That is bravely said.
Look how the sunlight comes like a conqueror, slant-
ing through the dark firs! It touches the poor child's

cheek—and now you stoop to kiss the place ; that is well done. Did you see how he smiled and moved in sleep ? He will wake soon with the evening light about him, to find wealth in his little brown hand, and in his heart the dream of a young queen's kiss.

Elf. Come. It is time to go home.

Jul. And after our many journeys by land and sea, is there still a home for us ? Arise, Aurelian ! come, good pup, and follow our gracious lady home.

ROUND DELIA'S BASKET

ROUND DELIA'S BASKET.

Dorothy. O Pussy, could you ever bear to leave our own dear little home, and your own little corner, and the mat, and the basket, and the milk-saucer? Of course we might take them with us; but how could you ever bear to have a great rough collie sprawling on your mat and upsetting your saucer? They say that dogs grow like their masters. Certainly that dog is very like Tom. Dear Tom! He certainly does make a great noise. He is so big; and his boots are so big; and he comes clattering in to that big hall of his: he always leaves the door open. Men are so clumsy; and, of course, a woman does get a little set in her ways, as she grows—

when she is getting to be—not so young as she—as she used to be. Then the dog comes jumping in at the window—there is always a window open somewhere—frightening one to death; and there are all sorts of draughts, and a great fire fit to roast an ox. No, Pussy, I am quite sure you never could be happy there. Dear Pussy! dear Delia!

What shall I say if he asks—what should I say if he were to—— He is such an old friend, and I am so fond—I have always been so fond of him since we were boy and girl together. O Pussy, I do wish you could advise me! Dear Pussy!

Dear, dear, how silly I am to be considering what I shall say before anybody—when nobody has asked—when there has been no question. I am old enough to know better—yes, old enough. If he had wished—if he had meant anything, he might have said something years ago—ten years ago—or more. I have known him all my life. Dear Tom!

And yet—I really do think that he must mean something. He comes almost every day. We have

been near neighbours and dear friends all these years, and yet he never used to come nearly so often. And then he doesn't come for anything particular; that is, unless—— He just comes in and strides about, and begins to say things, and doesn't finish; and asks me the same questions every day about little Lily. Dear Lily!

I don't believe that there is another man in the world who would have done what he has done for little Lily. To adopt a child is such a serious thing. No relation whatever to him. Just because her father was his friend, and nobody wanted to take charge of the poor orphan baby; and he scarcely more than a boy at the time; yes, it was good. I do think, Pussy, that he is the best man in the world.

But then no guardian, however good he may be, wants to come every day and talk about a little girl, and say the same things, and ask the same questions. And then his wanting me to keep Lily here when she comes back from her friends! Doesn't

that look as if—oh, but I must not think of it. Is that the front-door bell? Oh dear! There, there, Pussy; it's nothing; don't disturb yourself. It's nothing—nothing.

(Miss Dorothy listens anxiously; she gives a little jump as Lily comes in.)

D. Lily!

L. Didn't you expect me? Didn't you get Teddie's telegram?

D. No, dear. And, my dear, who is Teddie?

L. I'm very sorry, dear Miss Dorothy, but they all call him Teddie. He's Teddie Armstrong, Kitty's brother; he's an awfully nice boy; I don't call him Teddie to his face, you know, dear; but that comes of trusting a boy; he promised to send you a telegram the very moment he got to London. But how are you, dear? And how's Delia? Is she in her basket?

D. Yes, dear: but please don't touch her; I think she's asleep.

L. I think she's always asleep.

D. She does sleep a good deal; but when she is awake, she is the cleverest, dearest creature, the best companion—— But, Lily dear, I don't understand now why you are here. To-day is the day when you were to have gone on to the Blakes. Of course I am *very* glad to see you. Dear child!

L. All the Blakes have got the mumps—even old Mrs Blake; at least they think she has; only she's so fat that they can't be sure; and so I've come straight to you; and I am so tired of visiting; and I am so glad to be at home—almost at home.

D. Dear Lily! And you must be *quite* at home here. You are to make me a nice long visit. I settled it all with Tom.

L. May I stay with you always?

D. Dear Lily! But what would your guardian say to that? Tom would never forgive me. Of course the Hall is your home till you are old enough to be married.

L. I shall never marry.

D. Never is a long word. But you are quite right not to think of such nonsense for a long time. There is plenty of time for such a child as you.

L. When does one give up being a child?

D. Why, of course, dear, when you are grown up. What an odd question! And why don't you ask after Tom, dear? You really ought to ask after your good kind guardian. He is so good and kind. Dear Tom!

L. How is he?

D. What a way to ask! And why don't you say "Uncle Tom"?

L. Because it's silly. He's not my uncle. He's not the least bit of a relation. Uncle Tom! It's as if he was black.

D. You always used to call him "uncle."

L. When I was a little thing, and didn't know any better. Miss Dorothy, why did he send me away to make these stupid visits? And why does he want me to stay here with you instead of going—of going home? Tell me, please.

D. It is all because he is so good. You know how fond he is of you—dear Tom! he always was so fond of children!—but he thought that you ought to see some younger society; and so I am afraid he has been very lonely sometimes, for he has been over here a good deal lately; and—O Lily! I am really afraid, my dear, that you don't half know how good your guardian is.

L. Well, you know any way.

D. Lily!

L. And so he sent me away to play with the other children. He thinks me a child still; he——

D. Why, of course dear you are a child.

L. And when does one become a girl?

D. Why, of course dear, when you come out, and are a young lady.

L. I shan't come out. I've seen the world now, and I think it's silly. You can't think what nonsense those boys talk.

D. You won't think so always, dear; that is,

when they—— Yes, dear, I daresay they will talk nonsense to you some day.

L. They talk nonsense to me now.

D. Lily!

L. They do—at least some of them do—sometimes. They are so silly. They certainly don't say much. They only stare when they are with us, and yawn; and then one of them says, "Come on, Charlie," or "Regy," or "Bertie," or whatever it is, "and have a smoke;" and then they go away, and get quite lively, and we hear them laughing. Boys seem to have most fun by themselves. Boys ain't like girls.

D. But I thought, dear, you said that they talked to you.

L. So they did. O, Miss Dorothy, do you know Regy—Mr Reginald Chalmers?

D. No, dear.

L. He is *such* a dear!

D. Lily!

L. Oh, but he is. He has got a little tiny mous-

tache; and he waxes the points; and his man takes him tea in the morning before he gets up; and for two days he didn't seem to know that I was alive; and the third day, just after luncheon, he said quite loud that I wasn't "a half-bad-looking little girl," and I could have killed him. And after that he became quite friendly; and the next evening he stood staring, and twisting that little moustache; and at last he said, quite suddenly, "By George, you *are* in looks to-night."

D. I think that Mr Chalmers must be a very rude young man. He ought to know better than to speak like that to a girl in the school-room.

L. Well, any way he knows that I'm not a child. That's something.

D. How odd you are to-day, dear. You are quite defiant. I hope I haven't said anything to hurt you. Dear Lily!

L. Oh, no, no. You are always kind. O, dear Miss Dorothy, *you* will always love me, won't you? Promise!

D. Of course I will, dear. There, there! You are over-tired, dear. You must rest here with me. This is a good place to rest. There, there! You mustn't cry.

L. I don't know why I'm such a fool. And may I live always with you and Delia?

D. No—yes—perhaps, dear, if—— Lily dear, did it ever occur to you—of course you don't think of such things yet—but did it ever occur to you that your guardian might marry?

L. Marry!

D. Of course, dear, he seems to you to be very old.

L. No.

D. Well, you know, dear, that men do marry.

L. No.

D. You don't know it, dear?

L. I mean, yes.

D. I wonder if it would make a great difference to you.

L. No, of course not. Why should it? To me!—That's why he sent me away then—away from home.

D. Lily dear ! Don't you care if he is happy, or no ?

L. How could he be happy with that horrid Bertha Hale ?

D. Bertha Hale ?

L. It must be one of those horrid Hales — no, dear, of course they ain't horrid — it's I who am horrid ; and they are very good ; and I do hope he will be happy — and that's the reason why he sent me away. I'll never forgive him ; never !

D. Bertha Hale !

L. I suppose it's Bertha, unless he likes pale-green eyes. If he does, it's Caroline.

D. But what makes you think, dear, that Tom — that your guardian — thinks of any of the Miss Hales ?

L. They are the only girls within miles ; and they think of him — all of them. Oh, how he must hate me !

D. Lily !

L. Oh, but he must. I've mimicked Caroline's

intellectual look a thousand times; you know it—like this; and I've bridled like Bertha. Bridled!

D. (she is busy, and her face is turned from Lily).
Don't you think, dear, that if he thought of—of being married, that a man of your guardian's time of life would be more likely to choose somebody who was not—in fact, not quite a girl.

L. (after a pause). I don't know.

D. I think I hear a horse.

L. It's him. I mean, it's he.

D. Where are you going to, dear?

L. (comes softly to kiss her). I'm going to write to Kitty; and to send messages to Teddie and Regy, and——

D. Lily!

L. I don't care. I like boys. I do like boys. There! (*She runs away.*)

D. Lily! My dear! Come back! Please! Lily!
Lily, you must come back to see your guardian.
(*Here Tom Raymond comes in.*) O, Mr Raymond, oh!

T. Mr Raymond !

D. Tom ! You startled me so.

T. A pretty time to begin calling me Mr Raymond. It has been Tom and Dorothy for the last thirty years.

D. Not quite thirty ! No. I think not quite—not quite !

T. It's a long time. Have you heard from Lily ? She hasn't written to me for two days. You don't think she is ill ?

D. She is quite well. Dear child ! I never saw her looking better.

T. Saw her ! What do you mean ?

D. O Tom ! please don't look so fierce. I do hope you are not angry with the dear child for coming back.

T. Child ! Oh yes, by the by, of course you mean Lily—and she's here then ? Here ? In the house ?

D. Yes. She is writing a letter to Katie Armstrong. It seems that the Blakes have mumps in the family, and——

T. Mumps! Good heavens! Did Lily go there?

D. No. She came straight to me instead.

T. Ah! That's all right.

D. Shall I send for her?

T. No. Not yet. I want to speak to you first.

D. To me!

T. I've something on my mind. I want a woman's advice. I want to talk to *you*, Dorothy. It's about something of great importance to me. Can you spare me a few minutes? Will you listen to me, Dorothy? (*He takes her hand.*)

D. Yes, Tom.

T. I want your candid opinion. Am I too old to be married?

D. (*after a pause.*) No, Tom.

T. Are you sure? I never thought of my age till lately. I know I'm strong and fairly active; and I've walked and ridden this country day after day and year after year without stopping to think how old I was. It's a confounded ridiculous thing

for a man to sit down and think how old he is! I feel like a confounded fool.

D. Tom!

T. I do. I've had plenty to do without sitting down to pull out my grey hairs. I've been a busy man,—what with being my own bailiff, and farming a good bit of my own land. I've never had time to be much of a lady's man. That's what I want to talk to you about.

D. Yes, Tom?

T. Some men understand women. I never did. I've always wondered about them. When I was a boy, a woman's handkerchief or gloves left in an empty room was enough to make me awkward. My voice used to crack when I spoke to them; though I was loud enough—most likely a deal too loud—on the cricket-ground or in the hunting-field. And yet, do you know, Dorothy, I suspect I was a romantic fellow all the time. I'm half afraid I'm a romantic fellow still. I must be a confounded old idiot—but that isn't to the point. Only I want you to

understand that I know nothing about women. I was afraid of them so long, that the fear became a habit; I shall never get over it. Now I want you to tell me some things. First, are you quite sure that I'm not too old to be married?

D. Yes, Tom. I am quite sure.

T. And not too rough? I think I must be noisy. I never thought about it till—I've been practising at home. I've been shutting doors without banging them; and taking off my big boots directly I come in. I think I get on a little. It's hard, though, to reform at my age; and harder to reform the dogs. Of course I could turn 'em into the stable—all except Bairnie. I don't think I could turn Bairnie out of the house; she wouldn't understand it; and I love the slut.

D. Tom!

T. What?

D. Would you mind not going *quite* so near to Delia's basket. She has been a little nervous lately; and I am afraid you may frighten her.

T. Delia! Who's Delia? Oh, I know. Of course it's Pussy. Really I am awfully sorry, Dorothy; but when I get excited, I can't help stamping about; and when I get into a little place like this, all full of jolly little things, where there isn't room to swing a cat, I——

D. Tom!

T. What?

D. O, Tom, don't speak like that.

T. Oh, I beg your pardon. I talked about swinging a—— yes, yes, I won't say it again. I beg Delia's pardon. And I'll try to keep quiet. I'm afraid that I *am* noisy.

D. No, Tom. I am sure you are not. I am sure you can be very gentle when you think of what you are saying.

T. I can but try. Oh, then, there's another thing. How about my clothes? Do I dress like other people? I never thought about clothes till—that is, my tailor always sent down what he liked; they all looked alike to me. Now, these things that I've

got on—are they the sort of thing men wear nowadays?

D. Really, I don't think I have noticed—I am afraid I don't know.

T. Do they look all right? It's a confounded ridiculous thing for me to be turning about here like a tailor's dummy. Is there anything peculiar about them?

D. Oh no, Tom. I think they are *very* nice.

T. Well, then, there's only one thing more for me to ask. (*She turns away to stoop over Delia's basket.*)

T. You think it possible that somebody might really care for me?

D. (*faintly*). Yes.

T. Now take care what you say. You don't think it impossible that I should be loved—loved, mind you—by a young girl?

D. A young girl! (*She turns away again, and stoops to Delia's basket.*) Poor dear Pussy, your shawl is all rumpled. There, dear.

T. You hesitate. You wish to be kind; but you hesitate. You know it can't be. Thank you, Dorothy.

D. (facing him). No, Tom; no. I am sure that you may be loved by any girl. Will you tell me? May I know who it is?

T. You must know.

D. Is it Bertha Hale? or Caroline?

T. Bertha or Caroline? Good heavens, no!

D. I am glad of that, Tom. I think—perhaps I wrong them, but I can't help thinking—that they might have been influenced—a very, very little influenced by considerations of the property and position in the county.

T. There never was a Hale who wouldn't sell his soul—or her soul either—for a ploughed field.

D. Tom!

T. No, thank heaven! The little girl, who is the light of my eyes, and—confound it! I can't bear to speak about it; I couldn't say a word about it to anybody but you; you are such an old friend,

Dorothy—such a dear old friend ; you know what a fool I am.

D. Oh no, Tom ; and thank you very much.

T. She has grown up in my home as in my heart ; she loves the old place and not it's money's worth—she——

D. Tom, whom *do* you mean ?

T. Who should I mean but Lily, my little Lily ?

D. But, Tom, she's only a child.

T. I thought so six weeks ago.

D. How old is she ? Why, yes, of course—why, really she must be——

T. Never mind how old she is. Six weeks ago I hadn't thought of her age. I knew she was growing tall ; I supposed all children grew ; but I never thought about it. I'll tell you how it was. It was one of those first spring days—you remember them at the beginning of April ?—well, I was strolling across the lawn with my hands in my pockets and Bairnie at my heels—I remember the tune I was whistling—I suppose I shall never get that confounded tune out of my head.

D. Yes, Tom?

T. I heard Lily calling me; I looked round for her, and I couldn't see her.

D. Yes, Tom?

T. You know the old cedar, the one with the boughs coming down and lying on the grass?

D. Yes, Tom.

T. I saw something white in the shadows, so I stepped in. She was sitting on one of the big branches, with her back against the seamed old trunk—just about as high as my heart. No; I can't tell you what she looked like. She was like all sorts of beautiful things. Of course, I'd always liked to look at her; but I never thought about it before. She laughed at my finding her. I believe I could find her in a tropical forest. I put out my hands to lift her down.

D. Yes, Tom?

T. I'd done it a thousand times; I thought nothing of it. But somehow I'd never seen her eyes like that; there was something in them—what a con-

founded old fool I am! Before I had time to think if I would, or to decide that I'd better not—just at the moment when I held her in my arms, I—I kissed her.

D. But surely there was nothing strange in that; surely you had often—that is, that surely was not the first——

T. The first! I'd kissed her every morning and evening since she was a baby.

D. Well, then, why—I am not sure that I understand why——

T. I don't know. I never thought of that. I'd never kissed her at that time of day.

D. Yes, Tom; I see.

T. Oh, you see, do you?

D. Yes, Tom. And then you sent her away.

T. Yes, I——

D. Of course.

T. You seem to know all about it. I thought she'd better see some young men; confound 'em. I suppose she has seen some at the Armstrongs'?

D. Yes.

T. Well?

D. She says they are silly.

T. Ah!

D. But she seems to have found some of them agreeable.

T. Oh!

D. I am afraid she seems inclined to talk about them a good deal.

T. Oh!

D. But all the time she seems to be laughing at them.

T. Ah!—Well, look here, Dorothy. You must keep her here for the present. Will you?

D. Yes, Tom.

T. And you must have in the neighbours. She must see more people. You might have some tennis; and luncheons; and five o'clock teas; and things. There ain't many young men in the neighbourhood, are there?

D. Oh yes, there are a few: let me see; there's—

T. Oh, don't trouble yourself. You needn't bother about it—at least, yes, you must. Get 'em in in shoals; have 'em over in squads from Sandhurst; advertise for young men!

D. Tom!

T. She must see young men. Good-bye, Dorothy, and thank you very much. What should I do without you?

D. Oh, it's nothing, Tom; and thank you.

T. Good-bye! I'm off.

D. Without seeing Lily?

T. Yes; it's better. I won't see her for months.

D. But she'll think it so strange, she'll be hurt; she knows you are here.

T. Does she?

D. Yes. You must see her, Tom.

T. Must! Oh, well, I suppose I'd better. Just for a moment. I suppose I had better? Eh? What do you think?

D. I'll call her.

T. Stop!

D. What is it?

T. I don't know. I never felt like this before.
Dorothy, I believe I am frightened.

D. Very likely.

T. What do you think she'll do?

D. I can't say.

T. Oh, of course it'll be nothing. It'll be just as usual when we meet. She'll come and kiss me, and—eh?

D. I hope not, Tom.

T. You hope not!

D. Don't you see that if it is just as usual; that if she comes to you, as a child to her guardian; don't you see—— O Tom, how stupid you are!

T. Dorothy! what's the matter? Why, you never spoke to me like that in all your life before.

D. No, Tom. I beg your pardon, Tom.

T. That beats me. I told you I didn't understand women; but I did think I understood you.

D. Of course you do, Tom. Of course you understand me. But never mind me. I am going to call Lily.

T. I think I'd better go. Look here you know ; you've frightened me. It's your fault.

D. Very well, Tom ; it's my fault. But don't go. Don't be weak. You must stay and see for yourself how Lily meets you.

T. Confound it, Dorothy, you order me about as if I were a baby. You are not like yourself ; you are like somebody else ; you——

D. Never mind me. This is the right time, Tom. You must be brave now, and I hope and believe that you will be happy.

T. You are right. (*He wrings her hand.*) You always were right. I won't run. Call her !

D. (*at the door calls.*) Lily ! Lily !

(They stand still and listen. Lily runs in and half across the room towards her guardian. Feeling the excitement in the air, she stops. Still looking at the man, she turns away to the woman.)

D. Dear Lily! how stupid I have been! I thought you were a child, dear. I am so glad.

L. Are you glad? (*She looks into her eyes.*)

D. Yes, dear.—Tom!

(*He comes obedient and takes Lily from Dorothy's arms.*)

T. Ah! Is it—— Yes. O Dorothy!

D. Are you glad you stayed? You must take great care of our Lily, Tom. (*She stoops to the basket.*) No, Delia, dear, don't disturb yourself, dear. Dear, dear Pussy! It's nothing, dear, nothing.

T. Nothing! Yes, nothing for a cat to care about.

D. Tom!

T. I beg your pardon, Dorothy.

FLORIO



FLORIO.

It is night in Venice. CLELIA is alone in her balcony.

She sings in a low voice lazily :—

Death with my heart in a thin cold hand,

O dear Death that art dear to me—

Love of my heart, the wide waste land,

O my lost love, holds nought but thee !

There is nought in the land, or sea, or sky,

But thou, and the man that once was I.

A pretty farrago of love and death ! Whether this youth be singing to death or to his lady-love ; whether love be death, or death love ; whether his

lady be dead, or he be dead, or both ; let my little Florio say, if he can, for he made the verses and the music. How these children lisp of love and death ! One would think they cared not a jot which of the two came to kiss them. It is all a matter of the minor key. If a round-shot knocked the mandolin from young master poet's fingers, would he not crouch behind the chair with his milk-teeth chattering ? I have not seen my little poet, my singer of love-lorn songs, for days. He makes pretty verses, and not too powerful ; and yet they are not weak. Wonderful is the power of song. I have but to sing this rhyme of love and death a little louder, only a little louder ; and at the signal, from the low black arch opposite creeps noiseless a gondola. So slight a thread may draw a strong man,—one who dare sing of death and face him too. Three notes of this poor melody—of dear death, forsooth—would bring Duke Angelo from his great black palace. So one may lure spiders. But I will sing to myself only—softly—softly—

No perfume is left on the fair broad earth

But the scent of thy raiment passing sweet ;

No gold of price, no——

What man is that ?

Florio (who has climbed unseen to her balcony.)

No man.

Clelia. A poet, then. Why have you come ?

Fl. Why !

Cl. Because the night is fair, and craves for song ?
Have you some new numbers, little poet ? This
exquisite pale night is like a lady faint with passion,
a dumb queen who longs to sing. Find her a voice,
Florio. Sing for her and for me.

Fl. My song of death and love ?

Cl. No. Any song but that. Not that—not yet.
Where have you been these many idle days ?

Fl. Away from you.

Cl. Where ?

Fl. I know not. Only I know that I was not
with you. I meant to see you no more.

Cl. 'Twere pity, Florio.

Fl. Only a few days have gone ; only a few nights like this night, accursed, which burns me like a shirt of fire ; and I am here again. Yesterday I was far from this place. I had left you. I thought that I was free. And now I am here — here with you. Venice breathes flame to-night ; and you are Venice. How beautiful you are !

Cl. Yes, in the shadows ; beautiful as this night. Yes, I am Venice. She is a queen in tarnished gold, is she not ? Venice and I are growing old, and are most beautiful in the loving shadow of a night that half conceals. And this night is like fire to you ? Boy, it is full of coolness and softness, bountiful, tender, sweet. I am young to - night. Sing to me.

Fl. I have forgotten how to sing since you taught me to love.

Cl. Song without love is a cup without wine. If you had ever loved, your heart would be full of melodies, as the night is full of stars.

Fl. Cut like a gallant's love into a myriad little fires.

Cl. Often so—not always. There are many stars, but only one moon.

Fl. I am full of one love, as this night is filled to overflowing by one moon.

Cl. You are too young to love.

Fl. Why am I here, then?

Cl. To be with me.

Fl. And is that not love?

Cl. Or habit. There are many kinds of love. Listen, Florio. There is the love of a child for sweetmeats. Is yours such a love? There is the love of a youth for himself—a vanity which needs feeding by girls' glances; and this the young do for the most part mistake for love. Then there is the love of a man,—but that is terrible.

Fl. Is there no love of women?

Cl. Women are loved. They like to be loved. They love love. Florio, on such a night as this, I feel that every girl in Venice dreams that she is

loved. Breathless she awaits her lover. There is a sound of the guitar and mandolin; the whisper of a song; the soft lisp of the gondolier's oar; and the drip of silver drops from the blade that turns in the moonlight. Then in the black shadow a little window opens; there is a faint light in the room; half hidden behind the curtain she stands trembling; she wishes him away, and she wishes him anear; her lips speak without her will, and she hears his name in her ears, and her ears grow hot with shame. "Angelo," she whispers—"Angelo!"

Fl. Angelo!

Cl. Or Beppo or Pippo or Cecco: it matters not a jot who the man is, so he be man and lover. There is a girl. I have painted her complete from head to heel—a girl of Venice.

Fl. The night is sultry. I am stifled.

Cl. Ah, little one, you cannot feel the passion of this night. You cannot be a woman, poet though you be.

Fl. Poet! I was a bird with one note. You tamed me to your hand; and I am dumb.

Cl. Then I shall whistle you away. What! keep a songless thrush! Pipe to me, pipe! Think of all the maidens dreaming around us, dreaming all of love: think of them; dream of them; sing for them. Sing to me.

Fl. I can think of no girl but one; and she dreams of no lover. Or if she dream of a lover, she dreams of no man, but of some being pure as she and noble—such as men are not—or are not here in Venice.

Cl. And who is this girl? Some convent sparrow?

Fl. My little sister.

Cl. A tall girl too, and a pretty. I have seen her. And she does not dream of a lover? Is there no brown boy, no——

Fl. No. I have told you. If she have dreamed of love, it is of some angel-lover, noble and pure—as she thought me. And I shall make her weep! A curse fell on me when I saw your face.

Cl. My Florio!

Fl. My love! (*He falls at her feet, and the hand which she yields him is wet with his tears.*)

Cl. And you tried to leave me? Ungrateful. You will not leave me. This hour is for us. Is not this hour beautiful? Beautiful for me and thee?

Fl. For me and thee.

Cl. Sing to me, my bird with the sweet voice—sing to me.

Fl. I cannot sing. It is so good to be silent when I am near you.

Cl. Sing; and I will give you this rose from my breast. See! it is pale in the moonlight, but the scent is sweet. Sing to me, Florio; and as your song, like this queen rose, fills the night full with perfume; so like a rose my heart will open to love, as my arms open now. (*She stretches her arms to the dark palace opposite.*)

Fl. Drop your arms. They strangle me. They are great white snakes.

Cl. See how I obey you! Obey me. Sing to me—sing to me of love; but not of love and death—not yet.

Fl. (sings).—

If face of mine this night
My lady dreaming see,
I pray that kind and bright
With gentle thoughts it be:—

That no rude look of mine
Trouble my lady's breast;
But dreams of me incline
Her soul to sweeter rest.

*(As the last note of the music trembles to
silence, she laughs.)*

Fl. Ah! why do you laugh? It is horrible.

Cl. It is the song of a young monk. A pretty pale face to look into a dreaming woman's dream,—and make her sleep the sounder. This is a night too exquisite for sleep. It is a night of all the loves.

Fl. Of all the infamies! The hot air stifles me. It is full of the sighs of men, who lie deep in slime below these creeping waters. Every breath is heavy

with awful memories ; of secret judgment, and noiseless murder ; foul love and quick revenge ; blood of a thousand knives ; fumes of a thousand cups, and in each cup poison ; poison in the very flowers of God—in this rose poison.

(He sets his foot upon the rose ; she laughs again.)

Cl. Do you think that I would kill you ?

Fl. Have you not killed me ? You have killed hope in me ; you have killed my faith in woman. And here you stand close to me—your gown touches me—and smile, as if a smile could warm the dead to life. You cannot warm me to life. Will that crushed rose open its heart again, because you smile ? I am dead in a dead world. The world was all so beautiful to me—a web of colour, a fountain of sweet scent, its air all music. And then one day you smiled on me, as you are smiling now ; and perfume, song, and colour rushed together, and were one — were you. They found one exquisite form, and it was yours ; and love found a language in your eyes.

You held my heart in your hand, and you have frozen it. And you have killed truth too. I can believe no more ; and you have made me lie. When I am away from you, I comfort my soul with lies and find torture. I prove to myself that you love me. I have a thousand unmistakable proofs. Oh, I can argue with a fine subtlety. I explain to myself your every word, your slightest look. I show myself why I may be sure that I am loved. These are all lies. I am never deceived. I know that you are cold to me, as the grave will be cold. I know that you would play with me, and crush me, as this rose under my heel, when you are weary of me. I know you. I have judged you.

Cl. And condemned ? My Florio, look in my eyes, and tell me I am condemned. Look at me.

Fl. I will not. I know your power.

Cl. Why should I hurt you ?

Fl. For knowledge. Mine is the loving heart, and yours the surgeon's knife. You are cold and curious.

Cl. Cold on this night ! I think it is the beating of warm hearts that makes this pulse of the air. And what if it be true ?—what if I cannot love ?—should you not pity me ? Pity me, my Florio.

Fl. You did not pity me.

Cl. I almost love you for your scorn of me.

Fl. Yes, you can *almost* love. I pity you.

Cl. I am tired of men's praises. Give me more blame—— But no ! Sing to me.

Fl. That you may laugh again.

Cl. There will be no laughter. Sing before you go——

Fl. I am to go, then ?

Cl. All good things go. Sing me your song of Death and Love.

Fl. It was the first song I ever sang to you—that spring day on the island.

Cl. I remember. For my sake, Florio ! Sing it to me now. (*He begins to murmur the song, but she stops him.*) Louder and clearer, Florio. Let the night hear it all.

Fl. (sings).—

Death with my heart in a thin cold hand,

O dear Death that art dear to me—.

Love of my heart, the wide waste land,

O my lost love, holds nought but thee !

There is nought in the land, or sea, or sky,

But thou, and the man that once was I.

No perfume is left on the fair broad earth

But the scent of thy raiment passing sweet ;

No gold of price, no fame of worth,

But only the place where we did meet :

O Death !—do I call on Death ? Ah me !

I thought to call on Death, but I cry sweet love
to thee.

Cl. Do you know why you sang that song ?

Fl. To please you.

Cl. To please me ; yes.

Fl. What do you mean ?

Cl. It is my signal to Duke Angelo.

Fl. What if he find you dead ?

Cl. Put up your dagger. You dare not use it.

Fl. If I struck here, here in my heart, I should feel no more. You know me—you know I dare not strike. You have killed courage in me, as you killed faith, and hope, and love. There, take my dagger at your feet. God pardon you.

(He leaps from the balcony. She leans her bosom on the edge and looks into the water below.)

Cl. Will he drown? No. There he rises; he swims. I knew it. They do but sing of death.

Ah me! I would there were some other music than music; some other men than men. Florio has sung, and Angelo has heard his song. How sharply the black gondola severs itself from the darkness of the low archway! So death might steal from the shadows. And now again the music! *(From the*

canal rises the Duke's voice singing the song of Florio.) Ah me, but I am tired of that song!
(She tosses down to him the rose which Florio's heel had crushed, and so begins to laugh again.)

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.

"And there were some who held that this fountain must be sought in no wood nor valley of the world; but rather in the eyes of children, and in the strong hearts of men."

(COLIN, a youth who seems most woe-begone, meets
the elderly THEANOR, who almost seems a youth.)

Colin. And have you found it? Did it lie your
way?

No!—And I cannot find it. Seek, I pray;
The wood's not large, and somewhere in this wood
Wells the enchanted fountain.

Theanor.

'Tis no good.

Col. But the wise woman said—

Thea. She lied, methinks.

Col. Mock me not ! Help me ! When this parched
mouth drinks

From the bright fount of youth, I then shall live :

If the wise woman lied, here let me give

All that is mine to thee, for I am dead.

Here on this moss-grown root I lay my head,

And give my last brief breath to the languid air

That faints on the shadowed fern. Oh sweet and fair

Is youth ! I will not live with wearing age.

Thea. How old are you ?

Col. I'm twenty.

Thea. Sweet and sage

Is the ripe time of manhood ! Come, get up ;

The moss is damp ; come home with me and sup.

Col. Ah me, most wretched ! I am no more a boy.

The ecstasy of boyhood—the quick joy

Of life, free life i' the sun—is mine no more.

No part have I in fair fields loved of yore ;

In elms, that lay great shadows on smooth grass ;

In the slow-moving water, clouded glass

For maiden saplings, o'er whose noiseless stream
Hangs low the old red bridge, where I did dream
My dream of youth and friendship. All is gone ;
Lost, lost my friends—my friends—and I alone !

Thea. The boy is clean distraught.

Col.

Give me to learn,

Spirit of the wood, where 'mid the tender fern
Lies the enchanted pool ; give me to sip,
Where yet no weary mortal has set lip,
And put far off the hour of age from him ;
To feel again youth burn in languid limb,
Fire in the failing eye, fire in the breast.
Nay, she lied not ! I see ! Lo, where at rest
Lies the enchanted pool, cool, clear, and dim !
Lush grasses half afloat are at the rim ;
And in the midst bright bubbles, one by one,
Rise from the old world's heart to die i' the sun,—
Great Sun, who here and there through listening shade
Speeds a winged shaft for greeting ; all the glade
Is rich with young green fern, clothed all, save where
A great rock, breaking through to woodland air,

Tells of the neighbouring ocean ; in my ear,
Like sad sweet memories of a vanished year,
Stirring my soul with dreams too great for me,
Low croons the voice of the voiceless lonely sea.

Thea. Voice of the voiceless ! Mad !

Col. True it must be,
Or how should these eyes see it ? For they see
This picture always with them day and night ;—
The little glade flecked o'er with broken light ;
Fern-glimmer, and rock-shadow ; bubble of the pool.
O fountain of the forest, sweet and cool,
Give me to drink ; O sweetest, how I thirst !
And I shall drink thy waters—I, the first
Of many men whose youth has passed away.

Thea. Come, come, dear boy, you can't stay here
all day ;
Come home with me ; you're flushed and feverish ;
It's a wild fancy, a mere madman's wish
To be a boy again.

Col. Nay, mock me not !
If it be true, if this enchanted spot

Be here, close to us, here, you too would drink
And be a boy.

Thea. Good heavens! I! I think
I'd sooner be a monkey. I hate boys;
Dumb when they ought to talk, and full of noise
When one is drowsy. Boys are raw and crude;
Out of proportion; too polite, too rude;
Choked with old compliments. I! I resign
My knowledge of the world, my taste in wine,
My—ha!—my tact with women!

Col. Wooed, unwed
Ophelia, maid i' the maiden flowers dead,
May rose that couldst not live to life's hot June,
Hear my sad moan. Dead of the lark's glad tune,
That all too soon in the woeful dawn was sung,
Juliet, twice dead, sweet that didst die so young,
Oh hear me! Age with blighting eyes and dim
Looked not on these bright children. See! they swim
There—there!—beyond the oak-tree! See—there—
see!

Cordelia, Desdemona beckons me.

Hush ! Hear their singing. Hush !——

(A voice of a child singing.)

All the field for our delight
Blossoms fair with daisies white :
Angel fresh from Bethlehem,
Swept it with her garment's hem ;
In the morn the field did wake
White with daisies for our sake.

Marigolds in heaven high
Shine by night most gloriously ;
Yet an angel wandered down
Through our field with trailing gown ;
And when morning came anew,
Buttercups were filled with dew.

Praise to angels let us give ;
For they teach the flowers to live,
Teach the little birds to sing ;
And our lambs in early spring

Keep all warm, when heaven bright
Soft is spread with fleeces white.

Thea. Ah ! sweetly pretty !

Col.

Music be my guide !

Bird, girl, or angel, lead me to thy side.

Again the music. Hush !—

(The voice is heard again.)

Sunbeam from your heaven astray
Lead a child upon her way ;
Sunbeam from the hidden sky
Show me where the pool doth lie ;
Sunbeam stealing through the tree,
Touch the fount of youth for me.

Thea. Bald !

Col.

Silence ! Lo where she comes.

Thea.

I see

A little village girl.

Col.

It seems to me

An angel.

Thea. With a tattered doll, I think.

Col. Angel and child, ah, tell me where to
drink!

Where is this fount of youth? Nay, do not fear.

Thea. You frighten her. Come here, my little
dear,

And tell me—now I do not think I'm wrong
In thinking there was something in your song
About a fountain?

Child. Yes, sir.

Thea. And you know
Where this thing is?

Child. It's here; she told me so;
She said that I should find it in the wood.

Thea. Who said?

Child. The witch. She said if I'd
be good,
That I should find the fountain.

Thea. Well, in truth,
'Twas droll to send a child in search of youth.
Are you so old?

Col. Don't mock her. Speak to me ;
Tell me your tale, my child.

Child. Yes, sir. You see
Dolly and I were playing by the ditch,
Where the plank's put across ; and an old witch
Stood up in the hedge, just like a crooked thorn,
And said that my dear doll was old and worn.
Then I cried ; then she told me to be bold,
For that no people ever need be old
Unless they liked. So I came along the hedge,
Just as she said ; past the big elm to the edge
Of this great wood ; and somewhere on the grass
There is a pool just like a looking-glass ;
And when I see it shining in the light,
I'm to dip dolly in, but hold her tight.

Thea. The little dear ! I'm really quite distressed ;
It's too pathetic ; but the truth is best.
My dear, that was a bad old woman, who
Deceived my friend, and 's now deceiving you.
Be a brave girl ; don't cry.

Child.

No; I'll be good;

But please, is there no fountain in the wood?

Must dolly still be old?

Thea.

She must.

Col.

Not so!

Lift up your eyes to mine. Trust me; I know

How to bring back the rose to dolly's cheek.

Strange flowers in the moonlight must I seek

With moonlight rhymes. Your dolly's little head

Shall laugh in the sun with golden curls; bright
red

Shall be the lips, which smile when she is gay;

And garments meet for a queen's marriage-day

Shall fold her soft—your darling—yours and mine.

Trust her to me. Ere the next sun do shine,

I'll bear your little one to your mother's door;

And when your blue eyes open, on the floor

Just opposite your little lint-white bed

Those eyes shall see the golden priceless head

Of your old dolly—by my art made young.

What have you done to me? What bird has sung

A joy-song in my heart, as caged birds sing ?
I ope the door—Up, up with strong glad wing—
Beyond the trees, beyond the sailing cloud,
Up, high and free from the dull toiling crowd,
Up to thy home, where angel hands disclose
The inmost heart of the labyrinthine rose !

*(The child comes to him ; she puts up her lips
to be kissed, and lays her doll in his arms ;
then she goes homeward singing.)*

Come great mother Night, and spread
Wings for curtains to my bed ;
Closer, mother, till I rest
Safe and happy on thy breast,—
Safe and happy all night long.
Angels, keep the world from wrong ;
Angels, guard me in my sleep ;
And when morning light doth peep
At my window, let me see
Dolly safe at home with me.



PICKING UP THE PIECES

PICKING UP THE PIECES.

It is morning in MRS MELTON'S apartment in Florence. All the furniture is gathered into the middle of the room, and covered with a sheet. MRS MELTON is a widow and no longer young. LORD DAWLISH, who comes to call, has also forgotten his youth.

Dawlish. Good morning, Mrs Melton. I hope
—— Holloa! There is nobody here. What is
all this about?

(After some consideration he proceeds to investigate the extraordinary erection with

the point of his stick. After convincing himself of its nature he lifts a side of the sheet, pulls out an easy-chair, inspects it, and finally sits on it.)

She is an extraordinary woman. I don't know why I like her. I don't know why she likes me. I suppose that she does like me. If not, what a bore I must be! I come here every day—and stay. I suspect that I am an awful fellow to stay. I suppose I ought to go now. This furniture trophy don't look like being at home to callers. But perhaps she is out: and then I can go on sitting here. I must sit somewhere. May I smoke? I daresay: thank ye, I will. Smoke? Smoke. There is a proverb about smoke. I wonder how I came to know so many proverbs. I don't know much. "There is no smoke without fire." Yes, that's it. There is uncommon little fire in a cigarette. Little fire and much smoke. Yes, that's like this — I mean — Let me—what d'ye call it?—

review my position. Here I sit. Here I sit every day. That is smoke, I suppose—plenty of smoke. Is there any fire? That is the question. I wish people would mind their own business. It's trouble enough to mind one's own business, I should think. But yet there are people—there's that Flitterly, for instance—damned little snob. Flitterly makes it the business of his life to go about saying that I am going to be married; and all because here is a woman who is not such an intolerable bore as—as other people. Flitterly is the sort of man who says that there is no smoke without fire. What is this? That's what I want to know. Is this business of mine all smoke, all cigarette and soda, or—confound Flitterly! I wonder if I ought to pull his nose. I am afraid that that sort of thing is out of date. I don't think I could pull a nose, unless somebody showed me how. Perhaps if somebody held him steady, I might. I don't think I could do it. He has got such a ridiculous little nose. I wonder if I ought to give up coming

here. I don't know where I should go to. I wonder if I am bound in honour, and all that. Perhaps that is out of date too. I sometimes think that I am out of date myself. (*After this he fishes under the sheet with his stick, and brings to light a photograph-book, which he studies as he continues to meditate.*)

I wonder if she would take me if I asked her. I don't believe she would: she's a most extraordinary woman. Who is this, I wonder? I never saw this book before. I suppose that this is the sort of man women admire. He would know how to pull a nose. I daresay he has pulled lots of noses in his day. Does it for exercise. Suburban cad. A kind of little Tooting lady-killer. I wonder she puts such a fellow in her book. Why, here he is again, twice as big and fiercer. Here's another — and another. Hang him, he's all over the book.

(*He pitches the book under the sheet. Then*

Mrs MELTON comes in wearing a large apron, and armed with duster and feather-brush.)

Mrs Melton. Lord Dawlish ! What are you doing here ?

D. Nothing.

Mrs M. How well you do it !

D. Thank you.

Mrs M. But you are doing something : you are smoking.

D. Am I ? I beg you pardon.

Mrs M. And you shall do more : you shall help me. I have been up to my eyes in work since seven o'clock.

D. Seven ! Why don't you make somebody else do it ?

Mrs M. Because I do it so well. I have a genius for dusting, and Italian servants have not. In this old city they have an unfeigned respect for the dust of ages.

D. Have they? How funny! But they might help you, I should think. Where are they? There was nobody to let me in. Where are your servants?

Mrs M. Gone.

D. Gone!

Mrs M. Gone and left me free. I packed them all off—man and maid, bag and baggage.

D. But who will look after you?

Mrs M. I. I am fully equal to the task. But come, be useful. You shall help me to rearrange the furniture.

D. Help! I!

Mrs M. Yes, help! You! I am not quite sure that you can't.

(As he proceeds to pat the back of a chair with a feather-brush, it occurs to him to apologise for his intrusion.)

D. I suppose I ought to apologise for coming so early. Somehow I found myself in the Palazzo—

and the door of your apartments was open, and so I came in. I took the liberty of an old friend.

Mrs M. I believe we have been acquainted for at least a month.

D. Only a month! It isn't possible. It must be more than a month.

Mrs M. Apparently our precious friendship has not made the time pass quickly.

D. No. I mean that it never does pass quickly.

Mrs M. Work, work, work! It's work that makes the day go quick. I am busy from morning till night, and time flies with me.

D. Then you shorten your life.

Mrs M. And keep it bright. Better one hour of life than a century of existence! Dear, dear! how did my best photograph-book get knocked down here?

D. I am afraid that that was my awkwardness. I was looking at it, and it—it went down there.

Mrs M. Don't let it break from you again.

Here, take it, and sit down and be good. You have no genius for dusting.

D. Nobody ever called me a genius. I have been called all sorts of names; but nobody ever went so far as to call me a genius.

Mrs M. And yet you ain't stupid. I always maintain that you are not really stupid.

D. Ain't I? Thank you. Who is this man—this fine-looking man with the frown and whiskers?

Mrs M. He is handsome, isn't he?

D. I don't know. I am not a judge of male beauty.

Mrs M. Men never admire each other. They are too envious and too vain.

D. Are they? And women? What are women?

Mrs M. What are women? What are they not? Oh for one word to comprehend the sex! Women are—yes, women are womanly.

D. That sounds true. And women are effeminate.

Mrs M. Only females are effeminate.

D. Oh ! I wonder what that means.

Mrs M. But John is handsome. Ask any woman.

D. John !

Mrs M. Yes, that's John—my cousin.

D. I hate cousins. They are so familiar and so personal.

Mrs M. I like them. They are so—so——

D. Cousinly.

Mrs M. Precisely.

D. Cousins are cousinly. Does he dye his whiskers ?

Mrs M. Dye ! Never. He has too much to do. John is a great man — a man of will, a man of force, a man of iron. That's what I call a man.

D. Do you ? I don't call an iron man a man.

Mrs M. He is the first of American engineers.

D. A Yankee stoker.

Mrs M. Dear John ! He is a good fellow. He gave me that little jar by your hand.

D. Dear John is not a judge of china. I always hated that little jar. I shall break it some day.

Mrs M. If you do, I'll never speak to you again.

D. Please do. Tell me some more about John. Hasn't he got a fault, not even a little one?

Mrs M. He has the fault of all men—vanity. He knows that he is handsome.

D. I thought he dyed his whiskers.

Mrs M. He does not dye his whiskers.

D. You seem very keen about the whiskers. Here they are in all sizes, and from all over the world—*carte-de-visite* whiskers, cabinet whiskers, Rembrandt-effect whiskers, whiskers from Naples, from New York, from Baker Street. You must like them very much.

Mrs M. I like the man. I like self-respect, bravery, and perseverance. I like honest work. Oh, Lord Dawlish, what a shame it is that you don't do something!

D. Do something? I? I do do something. I—well, I go about.

Mrs M. Oh! you go about.

D. Yes—with a dog in England; without a dog abroad.

Mrs M. Oh! abroad without a dog. I regret that I shall never have the pleasure of receiving the cur.

D. The cur's a collie.

Mrs M. And so you think that man fulfils his destiny by going about.

D. Somebody must go about, you know.

Mrs M. Yes, a squirrel in a cage. What you want is work. You ought to take a line.

D. Go fishing?

Mrs M. Be serious, and listen to me. Here you are in Florence.

D. I believe I am.

Mrs M. You are in the midst of priceless treasures. The finest works of art are all around you.

D. I believe they are.

Mrs M. Take a line: take up something, for instance the Greek statues.

D. Ain't I rather old to play with marbles?

Mrs M. Not a bit. Nobody is old who isn't old

on purpose. Compare, classify, and make a book, or even a pamphlet.

D. I hate pamphlets. They are always coming by the post.

Mrs M. I suppose it's not the thing for a man in your position to turn author.

D. I don't think I ever did hear of one of our lot writing books. But that don't much matter. I should like to take a line, or a course, or a—I took a course of waters once at Homburg, or Kissingen, or somewhere; but they came to an end, like other things.

Mrs M. Lord Dawlish, are you joking?

D. No.

Mrs M. Then be serious: take up a subject; set to work; produce your pamphlet—at least a pamphlet. It might grow into a book.

D. Heaven forbid! I could not do it.

Mrs M. Why not?

D. Writing a book is so infernally public. I should be talked about.

Mrs M. How dreadful! The owl, who is modest withal, and shrinks from notoriety, remains at home until sunset.

D. You called me a squirrel before. Are you going through all the zoological what-d'ye-call-'em?

Mrs M. Perhaps even I shall be talked about before long.

D. I shouldn't wonder if you were.

Mrs M. Yes, even I, humble individual as I am, may perhaps be talked about when I set up my studio.

D. Your what?

Mrs M. My studio. Yes, I've quite made up my mind. There are many worse painters in Florence than myself. I mean to be a real painter, and no longer play with colour.

D. And sell your pictures?

Mrs M. For the largest possible prices.

D. Is not that an odd sort of thing for a lady?

Mrs M. No. We have changed all that. Many women paint nowadays.

D. I have heard so.

Mrs M. I believe that you are making jokes this morning.

D. I don't think so. I don't like jokes; they are very fatiguing. It's John's fault.

Mrs M. What's John's fault?

D. No man likes to have another crammed down his throat—unless he's a confounded cannibal.

Mrs M. Very well. I will refrain from cramming anybody down your throat. But I won't let you off. I feel that I have a mission.

D. Good heavens!

Mrs M. I have a mission to reform you.

D. Please don't do it.

Mrs M. I must. Why don't you do your proper work? Why not go back to England and take care of your property?

D. Because my agent takes care of it so much better than I could. I inherited my place, and I can't get rid of it. But luckily, land can't follow me about. That's why I come abroad.

Mrs M. Without the dog.

D. He stays with the land. He likes it. He hates travelling.

Mrs M. So would you if you travelled in a dog-box.

D. I wish you wouldn't talk about me. I am so tired of myself.

Mrs M. But you interest me.

D. Thank you. That's gratifying. Don't let us pursue the subject further.

Mrs M. I must. It's my mission. I picture the pleasures of an English country life. You build cottages; you drain fields; you carry flannel to the old women.

D. No; I could not do it. I don't think I could carry flannel to an old woman.

Mrs M. So much for duties. Then for amusement. Are you fond of shooting?

D. Pheasants are all so much alike. I gave up shooting when my sister took to it.

Mrs M. Your sister!

D. She is a keen sportsman—awfully keen. I went out with her once. I feel them still sometimes in my back when it's cold weather.

Mrs M. You like hunting better. In this country they shoot the fox.

D. Do they? That must be curious. I wonder if I could bring myself to try that. I almost think that——

Mrs M. Go home and hunt.

D. I have given up hunting. Rather rough on Teddie, don't you think?

Mrs M. Who's Teddie?

D. Don't you know Teddie?

Mrs M. Is he the dog?

D. No; he's my brother. I thought that everybody knew Teddie. Teddie knows everybody. Teddie likes me to hunt. He is always bothering me to buy horses—with tricks. Or to go by excursion trains. Or to shoot lions in Abyssinia. He is an awfully ambitious fellow, Teddie. Don't you think we might change the subject?

Mrs M. Not yet. I have not done my duty yet. Politics! Oh for political influence! Oh for power! Why, you must be—of course you are a—thingummy what's-his-name.

D. Very likely, if you say so.

Mrs M. An hereditary legislator. Think of that. Think of your influence in the country; of the power you might wield. Go in for politics.

D. Well, you know, I—I inherited my politics with my place, and I can't get rid of them. But Teddie does them for me. He was always rather a muff, Teddie was; and so they put him into politics.

Mrs M. Are there muffs in your family? Don't interrupt me. I must have the last word. Anything else I will give up, but the last word—never. In your position you must sway something. If you won't sway the country, sway the county; if you won't sway the county, sway a vestry, a workhouse, a something, or anything. Only do something. You would be a great deal happier, and—I don't know

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Mrs M. Procrastination is the thief of time.

D. More haste less speed. If one does nothing,
at least one does no harm.

Mrs M. Nor does a stuffed poodle.

D. Another beast! I have been a squirrel and an owl. And after all, I did not come here to talk about myself, nor poodles.

Mrs M. Did you come to speak of the weather?

D. I wanted to speak about you.

Mrs M. About me! Here's a turning of the tables.

D. May I?

Mrs M. If you have energy for so lively a topic.

D. May I speak plainly, as an old friend?

Mrs M. As a month-old friend. Speak plainly by all means. I've a passion for plain speaking.

D. It is an uncommonly disagreeable subject.

Mrs M. Thank you. You were going to talk about me.

D. I don't mean that; of course not. It doesn't

matter whether I talk about you or not. But there are other people here who talk about you.

Mrs M. Talk about me? What do they say?

D. They say things I don't like; so I thought that I——

Mrs M. Thank you, Lord Dawlish; but I can take very good care of myself.

D. Very well.

Mrs M. Why should I care what this Anglo-Florentine Society say of me? It doesn't hurt me; I don't care what they say of me; I am entirely indifferent; I am—— Oh, do not stand there like a stick, but tell me what these people say about me.

D. I—I—— It is so awkward for me to tell you. You know Flitterly?

Mrs M. Flitterly! A sparrow!

D. Oh, he is a sparrow! What is to be done to the sparrow?

Mrs M. Nothing. He is beneath punishment—beneath contempt. A little chattering, intrusive,

cruel—— I suppose it wouldn't do for me to horsewhip Flitterly?

D. It would be better for me to do that. I thought of pulling his nose: it's a little one, but I might do it with time. I think I should enjoy it.

Mrs M. It's too bad! It's too bad that a woman of my age should not be safe from these wretches—from the tongues of these malicious chatterers. The cowards, to attack a woman!

D. I was afraid that you would feel it.

Mrs M. I don't feel it. Why should I? Why should I feel it? But, good gracious! is the man going to stand there all day, and never tell me what this—what that—that—pha! what *he* says of me?

D. I don't like to tell you.

Mrs M. Do you take me for a fool, Lord Dawlish?

D. No; for a woman. That's a very different thing.

Mrs M. What does he say?

D. If you will know, you must. He says—he says that you and I are going to be married.

Mrs M. Married! You and I! Well, at least he might have invented something less preposterous.

D. Preposterous!

Mrs M. You and I!

D. I don't see anything preposterous in it. Why should not you and I be married? By George, I have made an offer!

Mrs M. Are you mad? You say——

D. Oh, I don't want to hurry you. Don't speak in a hurry. Think it over; think it over. Take time.

Mrs M. But do you mean——

D. Oh, please, don't hurry. Think it over. Any time will do.

Mrs M. Will it?

D. I am not clever, nor interesting; but if you don't mind me, I will do anything I can. You shall have any sort of society you like: fast or slow; literary or smart; or anything. Of course there would be plenty of money, and jewels, and cooks, and all that. You can have gowns, and cheque-books, and pin-money, and——

Mrs M. And find my own washing and beer Lord Dawlish, are you offering me a situation?

D. Yes—no—I mean that I——

Mrs M. A thousand thanks. The wages are most tempting; but I have no thought of leaving my present place.

D. I fear that I have been offensive. I beg your pardon. I had better go. Good morning, Mrs Melton.

Mrs M. Good-bye, Lord Dawlish.

*(So he goes out ; straightway her mood changes,
and she wishes him back again.)*

Mrs M. He will never come back. I can't let him go for ever. I can't afford to lose a friend who makes me laugh so much. Flitterly may say what he likes—a goose! a sparrow! a grass-hopper! I shall call him back.

(So she calls to him down the stair ; then from

the window; and as she calls from the window, he comes in at the door, watches her awhile, then speaks.)

D. Did you call me, Mrs Melton?

Mrs M. Is the man deaf? I have been screaming like a peacock; and all for your sake—all because I didn't want you to go away angry.

D. I thought it was you who were angry.

Mrs M. No, it was you.

D. Very well.

Mrs M. You must drop the *preposterous* subject for ever; and we will be good friends, as we were before. Sit down and be friendly.

D. Thank you. That's capital. We will be as we were before—as we were before.

Mrs M. You are sure you can bear the disappointment?

D. Oh yes. We will be friends, as we were. Much better.

Mrs M. Lord Dawlish, you are simply delicious!

D. Am I? Thank you. And I may come and sit here sometimes?

Mrs M. In spite of Flitterly.

D. Flitterly be ——

Mrs M. Yes, by all means.

(Then he meditates, and after due deliberation speaks.)

D. I should like to ask you something, Mrs Melton—something personal.

Mrs M. Ask what you like, and I will answer if I choose.

D. May I ask as a friend—only as a friend, you know—if you are quite determined never to marry again? I know that it is no business of mine; but I can't help being curious about you. I don't think I am curious about anything else. But you are such an extraordinary woman.

Mrs M. Extraordinary because I have refused to be Lady Dawlish. It is strange, very. Oh, don't be alarmed; I have refused. But it is strange. I am

a woman, and I refused rank and wealth. Wealth means gowns and cooks from Paris, a brougham and a victoria, a stepper, a tiger, and a pug: rank means walking out before other women, and the envy of all my sex. I am a woman, and I refuse these luxuries. You were mad when you offered them.

D. I don't think that I could be mad.

Mrs M. Not another word upon the subject.

D. But won't you satisfy my curiosity.

Mrs M. I never knew you so persistent.

D. I never was persistent before.

Mrs M. Such ardent curiosity, such desperate perseverance, deserve to be rewarded. I have nothing to do for the moment, and there is one luxury which no woman can forego—the luxury of talking about herself. You needn't listen if the effort is too great: I address the chair, or the universe. You will hardly believe it of me; but I cherish a sentiment. There! Years and years ago—how many I am woman enough not to specify—I lived with an aunt in Paris. You hate cousins; I am not in love with

aunts : however, she was my only relation ; there was no choice, and there I lived with her in Paris, and was finished ; there was nothing to finish, for I knew nothing. Well, it was there, in Paris—I was quite a child—it was there that I one day met a boy scarcely older than myself. I am in love with him still. Quite idyllic, isn't it ?

D. Very likely. In Paris ? Paris.

Mrs M. There never was any one in the world like him—so brave, so good, so boyish : he rejoiced in life, certain of pleasure and purposing noble work.

D. (aside). Cousin John ! Cousin John, of course. Confound Cousin John !

Mrs M. He fell in love with me at once, almost before I had fallen in love with him. We were both so absurdly shy, so silly and so young. I can see him blush now, and I could blush then. But I shall be sentimental in a minute ; this is egregious folly ; of course it is folly, and it was folly ; of course it was merely childish fancy, boy-and-girl sentiment, calf-love ; of course a week's absence would put an end

to it; and of course I love him still. But forgive me, Lord Dawlish. Why should I bother you with this worn-out commonplace romance?

D. I like it. It interests me. Go on, if it doesn't bore you. It reminds me of something — of something which I had better forget.

Mrs M. You shall hear the rest: there isn't much. He was taken away, and—I suppose forgot me. I came out in Paris, went everywhere, was vastly gay, and terribly unhappy. My aunt was youngish, and good-looking—in a way; she was dying to be rid of me, and I knew it; and so things were very uncomfortable at home, until—until I married. Oh, I told him the truth, the whole truth: I told him that the love of my life had gone by. I am glad I told him the truth.

D. American, wasn't he?

Mrs M. Yes. I was grateful to him, and proud of him. He was good as man can be. But he made light of my story. He thought, like the rest, that it was a mere girlish fancy; that I should soon forget;

that—— There, you have my story! Touching, isn't it?

D. It is most extraordinary.

Mrs M. What is most extraordinary?

D. Your story is like my story.

Mrs M. It's everybody's story. It's common as the whooping-cough, and dull as—as the mumps. But come, give me the details of your case.

D. The details! If I can remember them.

Mrs M. If you can remember! Who would be a man?

D. It was in Paris——

Mrs M. In Paris?

D. It's just like your story. Suppose that we take it as told.

Mrs M. Go on. I must hear it.

D. I was sent to Paris when I was a boy with a bear-leader. There I saw a girl—a little bread-and-butter miss,—and—and I got fond of her—awfully fond of her. She was the dearest little girl—the best little thing. She was like—like——

Mrs M. Go on. What happened?

D. Nothing.

Mrs M. Nothing! Nonsense! Something always happens.

D. Nothing came of it. They said boy and girl, and calf-love, and all that, like the people in your story: and they packed me off to England.

Mrs M. Why did you go?

D. I always was a fool. They said that it would try the strength of her feelings; that, if we were both of the same mind when I had got my degree, the thing should be.

Mrs M. And you never wrote?

D. No.

Mrs M. Nor did he—never one line.

D. They said she wished me not to write.

Mrs M. How likely! These men, these men! They never know what letters are to women. What was the end?

D. The usual thing. As soon as my degree was all right, I made for Paris. She was gone.

Mrs M. My poor friend ! She was dead.

D. Married.

Mrs M. Married ! how could she be so——

D. It's very like your story, ain't it ? Only in my story neither of 'em were American.

Mrs M. American ! What do you mean ? I wasn't an American till I married one, and Tom——

D. Then it wasn't cousin John ?

Mrs M. John ! No, no, no ! Lord Dawlish !—
Lord Dawlish, what is your family name ?

D. My family name ? What on earth, my dear Mrs Melton——

Mrs M. Quick, quick ! What is it ?

D. Why—er—why—Dashleigh, of course.

Mrs M. And you are Tom Dashleigh ?

(As she looks at him, the truth dawns on him.)

D. And you are little Kitty Gray ?

Mrs M. Oh my bright boy-lover, you are lost now indeed.

D. I think I have got a chill.

*(When they have sat a little while in silence,
she jumps up.)*

Mrs M. No more sentiment, no more folly ! Away with sentiment for ever ! The boy and girl lovers are dead long ago ; and we old folk who know the world may strew flowers on their grave and be gone. Look up, old friend, look up.

D. Yet you are you, and I—I suppose that I am I.

Mrs M. Young fools ! young fools ! why should we pity them, we wise old folk who know the world ? Love is but—is but——

(She resumes her dusting with vigour ; yet she can scarcely see for tears ; thus it happens that she knocks over the little jar which was cousin John's gift. He would pick it up, but she stops him.)

No, no : let it lie there.

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